THE NATION

APRIL 22, 1961 . . 25c

*SPRING LITERARY ISSUE*

# ON THE SMASHING OF FORMS

*SCIENCE*
**Bruce Mazlish**

*ART*
**Howard Warshaw**

*CRITICISM*
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***Poems by*** **Ben Belitt, Cid Corman, Barbara Guest, Edwin Honig, Ted Hughes, Denise Levertov, James Merrill, Hyam Plutzik, Charles Reynolds, Adrienne Rich, Vern Rutsala, Adrien Stoutenburg**

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# LETTERS

## The Rights Are for All

*Dear Sirs:* Your excellent editorial of April 8, entitled "*The Nation* Dissents," prompts me to send you the following copy of a letter I sent to the editor of *The Louisville Courier-Journal*:

"I am disturbed by your April 1 editorial suggesting that a committee of Congress should investigate the John Birch Society. I think the society is a disgrace to America, but I defend its right to express its ideas without interference by governmental agencies. . . .

"I am going to prison to uphold the [First Amendment] rights. I refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee when it inquired into what I had written, whom I had met with, what organizations I belonged to, and what I believe. . . . I go to prison to defend the First Amendment rights of all Americans, including members and leaders of the John Birch Society." CARL BRADEN

*Louisville, Ky.*

## Where Credit Is Due

*Dear Sirs:* I want to express to you my deep appreciation of the very generous characterization you have given me in the editorial which appeared in your April 15 issue. In all honesty, I must say that it really did not take much courage for me to do what I did, for the simple reason that I was merely reflecting the common sense of the good people of Maine and particularly the dedication of the residents of the Presque Isle area to their country. They are the real ones to whom the credit should be given—rather than to me. MARGARET CHASE SMITH

United States Senator

*Washington, D.C.*

## Contact!

*Dear Sirs:* I am only a humble stockholder in a humble venture with some humble friends, and the vicious, unwarranted and premeditated attack upon us and our loved ones by your Mr. Goodman (*Nation*, March 11) plainly indicates that the man holds no stock in *Contact*. Either that, or his mind has snapped. What is he, some kind of nut?

NELSON ("THE ENFORCER") ALGREN

*Chicago, Ill.*

*Dear Sirs:* My experience with *Contact* has been similar to that with other little magazines printed on expensive paper and full of photographs. The editors asked me for something; I gave them, as I always do, the best recent piece I had written; they rejected it, explaining that they had expected from me something like that other piece of mine which they had so much admired—and which somebody else had risked publishing.

PAUL GOODMAN

*New York City*

## New Logic Approved

*Dear Sirs:* I would like to express my gratitude for the article "New Logic for the Test Ban" by Anatol Rapoport in the April 1 issue. It is the most illuminating evaluation of our situation that I have yet read anywhere.

MARGARET A. FELLOWS

*Northampton, Mass.*

## Cultural Exchange

*Dear Sirs*: What amazes me about Mark G. Field's review of three recent studies of the Soviet Union (*The Nation,* March 25) is that though he has obviously devoted a great deal of time to intensive study of that country, he shows the same kind of stereotyped thinking about it that is characteristic of many very ill-informed people.

Take the section on Professor Barghoorn's book, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*. As a folk singer, I have had some personal experience in the cultural field, having shared a number of concert platforms last summer with Soviet artists in several cities in the USSR.

I quarrel first with Field's endorsement of Barghoorn's statement: " . . . Communists fear the give and take of free discussion. Spontaneity, informality, and even friendly self-assurance terrify them. They seek to orate but not converse. . . ." Field considers these "good words of wisdom for all those engaged in cultural, scientific or artistic contacts with Soviet colleagues." Forgive me, but this is sheer rot. There are, of course, Soviet citizens who are rigid in their approach to discussion with Americans. (Strange to say, the reverse is also true!) But I met and conversed with many Soviet cultural colleagues ranging from opera singers, violinists and theatre directors, to puppeteers, jazz musicians and masters of ceremonies, and if there was one general feature which characterized these contacts, it was their very informality, spontaneity and friendliness.

My second quarrel is with Field's apparent agreement with Barghoorn's view that cultural exchange can do little if anything to reduce world tensions because the Soviet people have no say in their government's policies. But it takes two sides to strike a bargain. No one who has attended performances of Soviet artists here can fail to realize that American enthusiasm for them has a dimension which goes beyond appreciation for their artistic excellence — it is an expression of good will and the desire for peace. The same dimension is present in Soviet acclamation for

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*NEW YORK, SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 1961*
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THE NATION

# EDITORIALS

## Young Man in a Hurry

It is the fate of President Kennedy to be premature—to be always a step or two ahead of the locomotive of history. He was elected to the House at an early age; his escalation to the Senate was premature; his hastily conceived, whirlwind campaign to win the Vice Presidential nomination in 1956 was premature by at least a decade. His successful bid for the Presidency in 1960 was, in a way, even more premature. And, in the logic of politics, his election was premature; normally a President of Eisenhower's vast popularity, in a period of peace and prosperity, should have been able to get his hand-picked successor elected. But Nixon defeated himself, thereby thrusting JFK into the Presidency in a phenomenally close election. The swing away from the Eisenhower brand of conservatism was not destined to take place—in accordance with Mr. Schlesinger's pendulum theory of politics—until around 1962. But the President, as usual, was rushing history.

To the White House, the President has brought the drive and energy of a young man in a hurry. He has bombarded Congress with messages based on excellent task-force reports in all major problem areas. He has given closer attention to the techniques of Presidential leadership and to the problem of creating a favorable public image than any President since Roosevelt. Even though a clear mandate was lacking, the President and his advisers apparently thought that essential aspects of his program could be maneuvered through Congress with a combination of arm-twisting, charm, "Irish Mafia" politics, excellent public relations, patronage, tact and considerable political skill. But Congress has not responded because the people have not responded. We are still living in the sunset, the afterglow of the wonderful age of Eisenhower. Six per cent of the work force may be permanently unemployed, but the stock market is booming. The Easter vacation findings are unanimous: Senators and Representatives of both parties report that their constituents like the young man in the White House, but they are not enthusiastic about his program.

Once again, in a word, the President is ahead of history. No sooner did he enter office than he was confronted with the misbegotten end-products of a succession of policy failures in the field of foreign affairs. Before the new program could be swept in, the accumulated debris of eight years of improvident housekeeping had to be swept out. And these things take time.

First there was Laos. Here the President's task, executed with considerable skill to date, has been to beat a retreat while pretending to advance—always a difficult feat in politics. Now there is Cuba. Here, too, the President is coping with the disastrous consequences of policies which he did not originate. The cloak-and-dagger operation of the CIA was initiated as early as 1959, and programs of this sort have a momentum which may be retarded, but is not necessarily halted, by a change of Administration. Next, the President must face up to the accumulated mistakes of our nuclear-deterrent policy in Europe. And beyond is the China issue, timed to explode on the eve of the 1962 Congressional campaign.

It is clear that the President and Mr. Macmillan have reached a limited understanding about China. Great Britain will no longer follow our lead in opposing that country's admission to the U.N., and the President will not object; indeed, there is some reason to believe that, along with Messrs. Rusk, Bowles and Stevenson, he privately regards China's admission as inevitable, perhaps even desirable. But it will take time, it is said, to prepare American public opinion, perhaps a year, and that much time is not available. Yet genuine new departures in foreign policy cannot be initiated until this disastrous inheritance of the diplomatic handiwork of the late John Foster Dulles is liquidated. Nor can the President expect the people to get excited about his domestic program as long as most of them are enjoying the sunset glow of the great postwar boom.

As a "New Frontiersman," it might have been better for the President to have come to power in 1964. But since he insists on upsetting history's timetables, he came to power in 1960, so that the role which, in the logic of politics, should have been reserved for Nixon—namely, to be Hoover saddled with the mistakes of

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Coolidge—has fallen to him. But the President may yet turn his peculiar destiny to advantage. He may be ahead of the people at the moment and even through 1962, but, in this revolutionary age, he may no longer be premature in 1964. The historical process may accelerate, the locomotive may yet catch up with the young President.

## Legality and Humanity

Juridically, the case against Eichmann is full of holes. When his crimes against the Jews and against humanity were committed, the State of Israel did not exist. Israel violated the sovereignty of a friendly state by seizing and kidnaping Eichmann, a peaceful resident of Argentina. Eichmann only followed orders — of Heydrich, Himmler and Hitler, all now beyond reach. The Jews are not impartial.

All this is true — and meaningless.

The law, and not only missiles and satellites, must develop. Where there are gaps in the law, they must be filled. When six million Jews were exterminated, where was the law? Insofar as there was a covering law, it sanctioned the extermination. The "final solution" of the "Jewish question" was decreed by Hitler, who was the law of Germany and the occupied territories. If things are to be allowed to go on in this fashion, there will be no national or international bar to even greater crimes, with the victims numbered not in the millions, but in the hundreds of millions, or right up to the two and a half billion who now inhabit the earth. Herman Kahn has an idea for a "Doomsday machine" which will blow up the world and kill everyone in it. No human hand need touch it. A computer, suitably programed in advance, will trigger the machine.

Kahn may be having hallucinations, but it is a sober, scientific fact that the capacity for mass extermination is growing apace and avertive morality is growing slowly, if at all. What the Israelis are trying to do is to bring humanity to its senses by making an example of one of the Yahoos responsible for the development of the Nazi murder machine, which foreshadows the development of the Doomsday machine. In this respect the Jews indeed are the Chosen People — they were chosen to be murdered and now they are the instrument of retribution, publicity and perhaps salvation. If anyone has anything better to offer, he has failed to speak during the past fifteen years and may with good grace now hold his peace.

## The Troubles of Adenauer

The conference between President Kennedy and Chancellor Adenauer may have been bathed in sweetness and light; communiqués of meetings between heads of state rarely communicate anything else. But, for the Chancellor's purposes, it could scarcely have occurred at a less auspicious time. He has an election coming up. The Eichmann trial is in progress, stirring up memories of a crime so vast that humanity has not yet been able to grasp its magnitude — a crime which was committed by some of the German people, sanctioned by others, ignored by still another section, and atoned for only by those who were least guilty and most sensitive. Then there is the problem of de Gaulle, whom Adenauer was supposed to keep in order, somewhat like a movie director handling a difficult but indispensable actor. Except that he is not attacking Hammarskjold, de Gaulle seems to have even less respect for the United Nations than Khrushchev, and he is thrashing about in NATO like a gorilla in a strait jacket. On top of all this, the trend of President Kennedy's views on the military future of NATO can scarcely have given the Chancellor happy days and dreamless nights; this may indeed be the crux of the Chancellor's future troubles.

The Chancellor is powerful, but also he is old, and he has advisers and possible successors who cannot be treated like office boys. One of these is Franz Joseph Strauss, his Minister of Defense, who insists that the NATO armies, which are mostly German armies, cannot fight without nuclear arms — preferably in their own hands, but if that cannot be, in the hands of American troops on their flanks. The idea is that any major move by the Russians in Europe, whether nuclear *or* conventional, will be met by instant *nuclear* response by NATO, i.e., the United States. But Mr. Kennedy, in his defense message to the Congress, has said: "Our objective now is to increase our ability to confine our response to non-nuclear weapons." Lyndon Johnson said the same thing in Paris. This does not mean that we would submit to defeat in a conventional war; as General MacArthur has said, in war there is no substitute for victory. But if it comes to a nuclear showdown, Mr. Kennedy would prefer to have the Russians start it. He wants to win, or at least achieve a draw, with gunpowder and TNT if possible. He wants to avoid the hair-trigger nuclear response dear to the heart of Franz Joseph Strauss. And so do we all.

## The Supreme Sacrifice

Lucius Beebe, the eminent *bon vivant*, recently dined and drank with two friends at the Brown Palace, which he describes in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "Denver's top-flight show place." A good time was had by all. "We rioted in classy viands and vintage abandon," Mr. Beebe testifies, "three of us and thirsty, mark you—for $30." Thirty dollars isn't hay, Mr. Beebe remarks, but he names several joints in San Francisco, New York, Las Vegas and Palm Beach where the check would have



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been $120, repeat, $120. Querying the management on the reason for this "comparative sanity in a wildly outpriced economy," Mr. Beebe was informed, "We have very little expense-account business in Denver. Most of our customers are spending their own money."

Mr. Beebe is not exactly a do-gooder. It is only that he likes the fleshpots and wants enough other Americans to be able to enjoy them so that he can write about such matters for a sizable readership. This is impossible when, as he says, good $5 claret is listed on the menu at $25 the bottle because the customer doesn't care about the difference — it's all on the credit card and the corporate expense account anyway. The well-heeled citizens who are not working for the corporations are becoming irritated by "well-upholstered jerks pre-empting the best of everything in restaurants, theatres, night clubs and airplanes," and Mr. Beebe feels it is a poor advertisement for big business.

There may be only one remedy, the same that was applied in the electrical price-fixing cases. The food in jail is nourishing, though the surroundings lack glamour. In New York, a federal grand jury has just indicted the president of a huge real estate firm on a charge of cheating the government out of $27,550.73 in taxes by overstating his business and entertainment expenses in 1954 and 1955. President John F. Kennedy is reported to be sicking Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy on businessmen who not only live on their expense accounts, but pad them, too. The wage-earning public, leaving 20 per cent of the paychecks with the tax collector every week, will not be distressed. The President has repeatedly called on Congress and the people for sacrifice and hard effort; the simplest response would be to insist that business can still be conducted, as it once was, *sans* martinis, dinner and two on the aisle.

## The Illusion of Consent

The press is agreed that the Reds suffered a severe setback in the April 9 election in South Vietnam. But in the familiar pattern of cold-war journalism, the news stories do not sustain the editorial conclusions. For one thing, as the dispatches make clear, the election was thoroughly rigged at the outset: the chief opposition leader, Phan Quang Dan, American-educated and pro-American, is in jail on a charge of treason. Diem's two opponents were political unknowns; even so, one of them, a seventy-five-year-old practitioner of Chinese medicine, i.e., an herb doctor, managed to poll 26 per cent of the vote. Weeks before the election, Diem had called up reserves and taken every military precaution to insure his re-election. So the results were predictable. Moreover, one would think that the curiosity of the editorial writers might have been piqued by the odd circumstance that Diem received his heaviest vote in districts which, it is conceded, the Communists control or largely dominate, and his lightest vote in Saigon, where there was enough of a "foreign presence" to insure somewhat freer conditions than prevailed elsewhere.

Despite these and other suspicious circumstances, the press insists on interpreting the results as a pro-Western triumph. But the triumphs of dictators are usually tainted. It should not be forgotten that Syngman Rhee and Adnan Menderes, shortly before they were ousted from office by their irate countrymen, had also scored "smashing" electoral victories through the use of techniques well known to dictators. Part of the ritual for securing American economic aid is the staging of rigged plebiscites designed to create an appearance of legality for regimes that have never had an honest mandate from the people. However useful these carefully rigged plebiscites may be in bolstering the morale of dictatorial regimes, in creating an illusion of legitimacy and consent, and perhaps even in deceiving the "enemy," there is no reason why our press should be taken in by them.

## Thunder from Formosa

The thunder, this spring, has come up not "outer China 'crost the Bay," but out of Taipei 'crost the Strait. From the Generalissimo's headquarters, great thunderclaps of threats and ultimatums have rattled across the strait, if not across the Pacific. Chiang Kai-shek has political antennae of a sensitivity second to none; not even Chancellor Konrad Adenauer is quicker in spotting storm clouds on the political horizon. The Generalissimo has recalled his Ambassador, George Yeh, from Washington and, closeted with advisers, the two of them have been plotting a strategy to cope with the situation which will arise should Red China be admitted to the United Nations at the next session of the General Assembly. And the dragon has now bared his fangs: an ultimatum has been issued. In an Easter Day message, the Generalissimo points out that the U.N., with Red China seated, would be "turned into a den of thieves" with which he—a convert to Methodism in his middle years—will have neither truck nor traffic. Should his ultimatum be ignored, he threatens to take Nationalist China out of the U.N.

What is most alarming about this threat is the possibility that in this, as in so many other crises, Chiang Kai-shek is merely bluffing. Can we be *sure* that he will carry through? Will he give us a bond that he will in fact withdraw Nationalist China from the U.N. if Red China is admitted? Will he take an oath on the Bible, or whatever sacred text he prefers, not to renege on this latest threat? For if he can be forced to honor his ultimatum, the China issue will be greatly simplified and the hope of an early settlement vastly improved.

Of all Chiang's Easter messages—in fact, of all his messages—we like this one best.



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# ON the BREAKING of FORMS

*THE CONCERNS of this special issue, which range widely over the history and present temper of our culture, are unified by the word "iconoclasm." The editors asked the writers who here contribute essays whether they thought this century was a period of form-smashing and, if so, whether a view of the times from that perspective would prove enlightening. Their views are various as to the meaning and prevalence of iconoclasm, but their reflections combine to describe a culture so novel that its basic forces have not yet been defined. By examining the idols of the tribe, these essays open new approaches to the task of definition.*

## Our 'Heraclitean' Period

### *Bruce Mazlish*

THERE IS a temptation, in a time of atom smashing (and the consequent shattering of cities like Hiroshima and Nagasaki), to conclude that ours is a time of form-smashing as well. We may be led, by easy analogy, to think of our society as being swept by an almost unprecedented unsettling: a destruction of forms, a sweep of iconoclasm. Against this view, however, I propose a contrary — or different — picture: that ours is, with a vengeance, a "Heraclitean" period, in which forms and fixity have all but disappeared. We live in a kaleidoscopic world (as we shall see, modern, abstract art reflects this fact) in which forms cannot be smashed because they hardly exist.

Such, I suggest, is our present situation. How have we arrived at it? I think the answer is to be sought in an examination of the true iconoclasts who have preceded us. For form-smashing in the Western world did occur; and it occurred, not in our time, but largely before World War I, in the period stretching from about 1830 on. We can trace the lineaments of this movement in a number of fields: the moral (involving the "human sciences"), the scientific and the artistic. Naturally, we can only touch here on the highlights, and even that with acknowledged temerity.

One of the most "shattering" declarations of this earlier iconoclasm can be found in Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1901-03). Tanner is shocking his poor Ann. "I am ten times more destructive now than I was then," he explains to her. "The moral passion has taken my destructiveness in hand and directed it to moral ends. I have become a reformer, and like all reformers, an iconoclast. I no longer break cucumber frames and burn gorse bushes: I shatter creeds and demolish idols." To Ann's bored comment that "Destruction can only destroy," Tanner retorts: "Yes. That is why it is so useful. Construction cumbers the ground with institutions made by busybodies. Destruction clears it and gives us breathing space and liberty." As we see here, the line between iconoclasm and vandalism — destruction for its own sake — is thin; Tanner knows that he must destroy, but he does not know what he wishes to construct in the cleared space.

Shaw, of course, is a fairly late comer to the excavation site of nineteenth-century faiths and ideals. Before him, to take some random but key examples, there was Karl Marx, who knew precisely what shape he wished to emerge at the end of the bourgeois form of culture; Friedrich Nietzsche, with his "transvaluation of all values"; Charles Darwin, who broke the image of man as a being separate from the rest of the animals; and, contemporary with Shaw, Sigmund Freud, who destroyed, among other things, the dichotomy between civilized, rational man and primitive, passional man. The iconoclasm of these men, and others like them, produced the "Heraclitean" aspect of our present time in what I have loosely called the moral field.

For our purposes, two aspects of Marx's work need to be singled out: his theory of ideology and his theory of dialectical materialism. The first suggested that our ideas are merely reflections or psychic projections — not independent, eternal truths — of our material conditions of production. And the second — the theory of dialectical materialism — implied that these material conditions are always changing. The initial effect of the two theories was to rear aside the veil of illusion put up by the bourgeoisie, and to show that its law, morality and religion were so many prejudices: the result, therefore, was a repudiation of existing values. The more long-range effect was to destroy "absolutes" and "fixities" of any kind (and this in spite of Marx's attempt to establish a Communist absolute in place of what he had destroyed), and to leave only a world of shifting appearances.

Nietzsche completed the "transvaluation of all values." He showed that there is no one truth of morality, but merely a number of perspectives, of which none can claim to be absolute. As he remarks in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), every philosophy or world-view is merely the confession of its originator. But Nietzsche does not leave the matter there; he seeks the springs in our soul which give rise to our particular confession. To obtain this information he invites us to plunge into our own depths, in search of a new awareness of self, a new self-consciousness; it is a novel form of philosophic skin-diving, for which we must nerve ourselves. The result is his discovery that altruism may be a deception, that intention may be only an outward sign or symbol: in short, that "Everything deep loves masks."

From Nietzche's "transvaluation" emerges a new view of truth and a new perspective on the self. Our personalities are no longer fixed, for behind them lurks only the seething cauldron of a formless "will to power." And this interpretation accords—how this would delight Nietzsche's philologist heart!—with the very origin of the word "personality," from the Latin "persona," meaning a mask, the mask used in a play. The self which is left to us after Nietzsche is no longer an essence but a series of masks which we assume. (From this point on, the line to existentialism, where "existence precedes essence," is clear.)

IT IS DIFFICULT to say how much of Nietzsche's work was influenced by Darwin, but both men were occupied with the notion of existence as a struggle. Out of Darwin's "natural history" of struggle came a major revision of man's image of himself as a unique, fixed fig-

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ure in the universe. The first step in this direction had been taken by Galileo, who "naturalized" man by demonstrating that the planet he inhabits is similar to the heavenly bodies. The next step was prepared by Linnaeus, in 1755, when he revised his classificatory scheme to include *homo sapiens:* henceforth, man was no longer a being totally different in kind from the other animals, midway between them and the angels, but only a natural being further up the classificatory scale. Linnaeus' scheme, however, was static: into this *rigor mortis* Darwin breathed life. The result: by showing man as descended from other animals (the *Descent of Man,* 1871, concluding what the *Origin of Species,* 1859, had begun) he succeeded in eliminating the second discontinuity—to use the nice phrase of Jerome Bruner—that between man and the animal world.

The success of Darwin's work had numerous and powerful effects. One was to substitute, in the period following, the predominance of biological for physical science, and thus to substitute images of life processes for those relating to mechanical systems. Another, and the greatest, effect was to introduce the idea of evolution, of constant and unremitting change, as the dominant mode of viewing the world. The result was that, throughout that world, all things, man included, had now to be conceived of as being in a perpetual state of variation.

Darwin had removed one discontinuity; it was reserved for Sigmund Freud to remove another. He eliminated the distance between the primitive and the civilized man, between the child and the adult, and between the pervert and the normal person. By treating man as a natural object, amenable to the same objective, disinterested approach as previously used by man on the non-human materials of nature, Freud, like Darwin, helped "naturalize" man. In short, he put man on a sliding scale.

Freud, along with Marx, Nietzsche, Darwin and many others whom we have not even touched upon, have left us—modern man—in a world characterized by an acceptance of the notion of change and by an awareness of the shifting nature of reality: physical, social and personal. Not only have our previously fixed ideas and values been transvalued; they have been shattered in an Alcibiadean fury of iconoclasm. All the masks on the gods have been torn off.

IT IS my contention, then, that the real form-smashing in Western civilization occurred before World War I, and that it took its dominant tone from thinkers in the human or moral sciences (and I place Darwin in this group). Color and strength were given to this development by work in art, music and literature, and in the natural sciences. Though I am emphasizing the primary place of iconoclasm in the human sciences, some attention must also be given to the highlights from these other fields, and the thesis as to iconoclasm as a pre-World War I phenomenon tested by their evidence.

In general, we tend to forget how dated and no longer *à la mode* modern art is. In reality, however, almost all the important work, leading from the Impressionists to, say, the movements of cubism, futurism and abstractionism, and to the innovating work of the early Picasso and of men like Braque, Léger, Gris, Klee and Kandinsky, was accomplished before the actual holocaust of the First World War. The landscape of art which we inhabit today differs little, though it is better explored, from that of 1914. It is a landscape from which all existing forms have been swept away, so that it might be ready for some new construction yet to be decided on. The closest equivalent to Tanner in modern art could well be Piet

## Procession in Lima (1947)

*(From the Spanish of Pablo Neruda)*

There were many to shoulder
the idol: multitudes
packed into queues and
debouching like sea-water
phosphorescent with purple.

Dancing and leaping and grinding
their teeth on a ritual mumble,
in a merging of voices: fish-fry and chicken-gut
and dour tambourines.

Lavender waistcoats and lavender
shoes, hats smutty
with violet,
avenues brimming like rivers
with the sick and the pustulant
that emptied their filth
on the impotent glass of cathedrals.
A thing inexhaustibly
sad, like the incense, an extravagant
rabble of ulcers
wounding the onlooker, that merged
with the aphrodisiacal fire
and fused in a sea of the living.

I looked long: at the swag-bellied
landholders, sweaty with surplices,
scratching the droplets
of hallowing sperm from their neckbands.

Saw the slovenly worm
in the mountain's sterility,
the Indian faces supine among platters
and cannikins; a pathos of llamas
and llama-boys; the spindle-shanked
virgins that languish in sacristies,
parochial schoolmasters
blue-faced and hunger-marked.
Narcotic with dancing,
stamping their feet on invisible
drums, the Negroes moved on
in their amethyst nightgowns.
A country was beating its breastbone—
the whole of Peru, with its gaze
on an idol, sky-blue and roseate,
our lady of niceties
parting their heads like a sea
in her shallop of sugar-stick
and swelling a sweltering air.

BEN BELITT



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Mondrian, with his clear, more or less empty, canvases.

So, too, in music, Wagner strained against the limits of tonality in the nineteenth century, and set the stage for its breaking in the twentieth. Arnold Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, with its weird wandering and haunting sense of homelessness—because there is no key—shattered the world of music in 1912. A year later, Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, with its jarring turn to "primitivism" and its exciting use of dissonance and bi-tonality, added its energy to the overthrow of the old forms.

By World War I, James Joyce was already wading in the stream of consciousness: a literary method abandoning conventional, logical, "fixed" associations among words in order to arrive at a new, variable "logic" of emotional association. He rebelled against accepted values, as well as against literary forms. Thus, in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), he announced: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church."

So, too, Ezra Pound and others had set the stage for T. S. Eliot's *The Waste-land* (not itself published till 1922) which, both by form and content, pointed up the empty, desolate and lonely landscape inhabited by modern man. Thus, Eliot's method in the poem is to transcend ordinary space and time in favor of a felt order of space and time—we jump back and forth from Elizabethan to modern times, from the north to the south of Europe—and to use words for their evocative effects. There is little effort at normal, public, "fixed" communication. And this coincides with Eliot's view as to the breakdown of our shared civilization. Our culture, Eliot is saying, is merely "A heap of broken images"; our heritage meaningless, "withered stumps of time told upon the wall." It is Tanner's world of "shattered creeds and demolished idols" par excellence.

WHAT of the world of natural science? Once again, we tend to forget how early non-Euclidean geometry first made its appearance. It was around the 1830s that three great and original minds—Gauss, Lobachevski and Bolyai—began to question the self-evident nature of Euclid's parallel axiom. True, as C. P. Snow has so well expressed it, "the discovery was hung up for thirty years—by Gauss's timidity, Bolyai's lack of professional power, the miserable behavior of Lobachevski's colleagues." But it finally broke through with Riemann's dissertation "On the Hypotheses Underlying Geometry" (1854, but not published till 1868), where the talk is of hypotheses, not axioms, and of hypothetical truths, dependent upon the validity of certain assumptions, rather than of categorical and self-evident propositions. In place of one absolute, fixed geometry, there were several, all equally tenable. No wonder Bolyai exclaimed: "I have created a new and wonderful world!"

He had also destroyed. With his co-workers in mathematics, he had begun the undermining of the notion that nature and her laws are fixed, self-evident entities. Einstein's work in relativity (the initial effort dating from 1905) extended the non-Euclidean shaking to the ideas of absolute space and time, and did for physics what had been done in the new geometry. Only Heisenberg's work, on the indeterminacy principle, falls after World War I, in 1927. By that time, however, the destruction was complete: the simple, visual picture of both the atom and the universe had been completely shattered. The old form had gone, and in its place stood a mathematical equation in, as Heisenberg put it, "an abstract space of many dimensions."

HERE we must stop. I have outrun my knowledge—and perhaps yours—of modern science. I have taken, with great boldness and *élan*, various examples from the human sciences, art, music and literature to illustrate my thesis, some might say to fit it. In spite, however, of any arbitrariness that might be involved, I think the first part of my general thesis will stand: an unprecedented burst of iconoclasm has swept the Western world, not in our time, but in the period roughly stretching from 1830 to 1914. The result, at least for those at the frontier of thought (and overlooking the present "conservative" attempt to return to the past), has been a widespread "denial of faiths, abandonment of traditions, and repudiation of values."

All of this has come about in the name of iconoclasm: an iconoclasm which destroyed in order to prepare the ground for new idols and ideals. What, however, has been the result of that iconoclasm? Have the new forms arisen?

Here I come to the second part of my thesis: ours is a "Heraclitean" period, in which we do not smash forms—because we no longer believe in forms at all. In this post-iconoclastic era, there are no absolutes, whether of morals and values or of space and time; nor are there "fixed" views, whether of the self or of society. In place of dogmas, we have ideologies; in place of faiths, we have psychic projections. Instead of man's occupying a unique, clearly defined and unchanging place in the world, he is, as a species, continuous with the animal world and, as a "civilized" being, close to the child and the primitive (an image confirmed in our time, for example, by the art of Klee and Picasso). Modern man is a little like the player in Gilbert and Sullivan, engaged in a game, "On a cloth untrue, with a twisted cue, and elliptical billiard balls."

All is perspective and process. In such a world, there are no statues to deface. As one of my friends has remarked: "Who today is smashing religion? You couldn't find a single atheist in public life, or an acknowledged immoralist (I hasten to add that I use the term in its pre-beatnik sense; that pale protest merely illustrates my point from the other side) in artistic life." His lament is like Villon's, "Where are the iconoclasts of yesteryear"; and just as forlorn.

IN A SENSE, then, ours is a unique period. Previous eras have been unsettled, subject to rapid change and iconoclastic (even in the literal sense). But always, when x-idol was attacked, it was attacked in the name of an alternative, y-idol, or at least in the hope of an alternative. Today, there is no y. There is only process. Our motto might be: "Change for change's sake," for no new forms—no fixities—seem to emerge from the change. It is not by accident, then, that our dominant philosophies are pragmatism or existentialism (or logical analysis, which seeks to do away entirely with the metaphysical idols) and our scientific ethos one of operationalism or instrumentalism.

It is exactly this state of affairs, however, which is our challenge. Do we accept the existing situation (and there is much to be said for this)? Are we comfortable with it? Or do we seek to go back to old, conventional forms? Or to create new forms? Are there any such, looming on the horizon?

Hitherto, to use Matthew Arnold's phrases, we have been

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born.

I have tried to suggest why our world is "dead," in the sense that it is living largely in terms of the landscape bequeathed to us by the iconoclasm of the period which ended almost half a century ago. What will the new world look like? We shall only know after we recognize our situation as a "Heraclitean" one and, from this awareness, seek to discover our "true" bearings.



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# The Next New Criticism

*Norman N. Holland*

ON OCTOBER 15, 1897, a promising young Viennese neurologist wrote his friend in Berlin, "I have found love of the mother and jealousy of the father in my own case too, and now believe it to be a general phenomenon of early childhood." "If that is the case," he went on, "the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex,* in spite of all the rational objections to the inexorable fate that the story presupposes, becomes intelligible. . . . Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy." When Freud added that literary remark (almost as though Sophocles were guiding his thinking), he planted an intellectual time bomb, the result of which conceivably could be to destroy the phenomenon we know as literature.

But it is curious that, even long after psychoanalysis itself had become a parlor pastime at Greenwich Village parties, conventional literary critics paid, on the whole, little attention to the fairly revolutionary psychoanalytic literary hypotheses. Even today, the connections between literary criticism and psychoanalysis are hesitant, few and tentative. One reason is that literary critics for the past forty years or so have been busy about a revolution of their own; another is that the psychoanalytic approach, despite a development that often seems to parallel that of the New Criticism, in some ways runs exactly counter to the most cherished assumptions of that first critical revolution of the century.

As of, say, 1910, literary criticism tended to be a genteel talking around and about books. Curiously, we can think of it as a left-handed quest for solidity. Beginning with Aristotle, literary critics have always sought certainty, but in sharply differing ways. The Enlightenment found its certainty in rules and canons; the Victorians in biography; the Edwardians found it in literary history, largely Anglo-Saxon literary history, the tracing of movements and sources and influences outside the work itself. Once exploration moved inside this rim of the known, the critic's remarks on the work itself became mere impressions, uplifting, belletristic, pontifical, but none the less mere impressions. So far as the works themselves were concerned, the critic felt his only sureness was to describe his own visceral reactions. A more eloquent way of putting it is Anatole France's, "The good critic is he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces."

Into this genteel, book-lined, old madeiraed world of Edwardian and Georgian *literateurs* popped the so-called New Criticism, jargony, brash, pretentious, squarely contrary to the former fashion, but eminently congenial to the scientistic twentieth-century spirit. As practiced first by Eliot, Pound and Richards, then, in the thirties and forties by the critics in *Scrutiny, Hound and Horn,* or the *Kenyon Review,* "new" criticism meant first and foremost a great deal of pompous verbiage, frequently the invention of whole theories of literature from a couple of lyrics. Underneath the pretensions, though, New Criticism put forth what we can now accept as a sensible, straightforward methodology. The critic first must analyze the work itself and he must put aside all biography, historical background, speculations about author's intention, considerations moral, political and cultural, everything, in fact, except a dictionary, until he has understood what is, after all, the central thing, the work itself.

FREUD himself pointed out in his essay, "The *Moses* of Michelangelo" (1914), the similarity of psychoanalytic interpretation to this kind of aesthetic analysis, which considers works of art as things-in-themselves (rather than referring them to some hypothetical author's intention), which turns away from a mere general impression of the whole to bear down on the significance of minor details. Freud did not know of New Criticism as such; what he was endorsing was a method derived from ways of deciding questions of authenticity in painting. Yet this method as developed further by Wölfflin or Berenson corresponds exactly to the literary analyses of the Russian formalists or the English and American New Critics.

A famous bugaboo in the New Criticism was the question of referring literary utterances to the author's intention (a procedure dismissed as the intentional fallacy—occasionally the intentional heresy by critics who regarded their doings as religion rather than logic). Freud, in his *Moses* essay and his studies

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of puns, dreams, slips of the tongue, and all parapraxes, Freud, too, takes this view of intention: the author's intention can be learned only from what he in fact says, not from what he says he intended to say, a quite new critical view.

The New Critic regards a play or a novel less as the chronicling of a series of characters and events than as a linguistic event with its own poetic logic. In the same way, a psychoanalyst takes a patient's telling of a dream (for example), partly as information about the dream, but as much or more as a linguistic event with its own unity about a central theme or topic.

In short, reduced to its simplest, even crudest, terms, we can say that what Freud gave the literary critic was a second dictionary and a second grammar. The dictionary (admittedly a highly personal and variable one) of our symbols and childhood fantasies recognizes the events of our experience, everyday or literary, as corresponding to our personal fantasies about ourselves, our bodies, the families of our childhood. The new grammar is the grammar of primary-process thinking, the pre-logical processes of condensation and displacement that we see in dreams, jokes, or poetry. Where the New Critic, working with a conventional dictionary and grammar, draws conclusions in terms of intellectual content, the psychoanalytic critic, working in much the same way, but with a darker dictionary and grammar, tells us what the work says in the language of the unconscious to the unintellectual parts of our minds.

New Criticism and psychoanalysis show striking similarities in method and in their common preoccupation with language. Both of them fall into one of the characteristic patterns of twentieth-century form-smashing, the scientistic. It is perhaps most clearly represented in the early forms of philosophical positivism: the view that meaningful discourse must turn away from values (which become mere visceral reactions, glorified grunts) to verifiable facts. In this context, philosophy itself (like literary criticism or psychological interpretation) becomes simply the analysis of linguistic events. Historically, New Criticism was much influenced by positivism through such men as Richards, Empson, or Philip Wheelwright. These men, in turn, influenced such psychoanalytic thinkers about language as Ernst Kris or the recent psychoanalytic investigators of symbolism in England. Freud himself sometimes sounds faintly like a Carnap or Wittgenstein: "The moment a man," he wrote in 1937, "questions the meaning and value of life, he is sick, since objectively neither has any existence." New Criticism, psychoanalytic interpretation, and the linguistic analyses of the positivists represent three related kinds of scientistic form-smashing. Each turned aside from received values, literary, moral and metaphysical, not so much in favor of other values as in favor of facts. The critic, psychologist, or philosopher retreated to something he could look at objectively, a literary text or what the patient in fact said, or what a scientist could verify. Only after he analyzed the facts did he smash any received forms and then, not so much because they were "wrong" as because they were, in one of the most characteristic words of our century, "meaningless."

SOMEDAY, when the intellectual history of this century is written (by what amoebas or opossums?), one of the great puzzles will be, Why did two disciplines so closely related in methods and interests as New Criticism and psychoanalysis stand so long apart? A few critics, among them Edmund Wilson, William Empson and Kenneth Burke, brought psychoanalysis proper into their criticism early and well. There are more now, Leon Edel, Leslie Fiedler, Lionel Trilling, Gordon Smith, Simon Lesser, Louis and Selma Fraiberg, and others writing for the important, but still little, little magazine *Literature and Psychology*. Nevertheless, most New Critics have ignored psychoanalytic criticism, so that New Criticism and psychoanalytic criticism rest uneasily like two momentarily divided but potentially dangerous chunks of plutonium.

Partly, the strictly literary critics have been busy about their own hard-fought revolution; partly much psychoanalytic criticism violates the basic axiom of New Criticism. Psychoanalysis, after all, deals with minds; New Criticism with texts. The psychoanalytic critic is all too eager to turn to the author's mind or the character's (Lewis Carroll's relations with little girls or Hamlet's Oedipus complex). The now not-so-New Critic insists on the text first and foremost, dismisses biographical speculations, and considers the character not so much a human being as a "function" or "voice," incapable of having an Oedipus complex. Psychoanalysis demands a mind, and the obvious mind to satisfy both New and psychoanalytic critics is the audience's (as in Freud's original dictum about *Oedipus Rex*), but the two criticisms rarely meet there and it is a little frightening to imagine what may happen when they do.

Commerce, however, rushes in where critics fear to tread, and psychoanalytic criticism of audience response is just another name for motivational research. The gas-station attendant stabs the spigot into the throbbing convertible of "the man with drive." The man the girls pass by nudges the erect tube of Brylcreem which promptly ejaculates a white drop of pure sex appeal. Vance Packard may be persuaded, but for most of us even the most rudimentary knowledge of that psychoanalytic dictionary and grammar constitutes our defense. What happens with literature? When Arthur Miller shows us an aging longshoreman languishing oedipally over his daughter, when Tennessee Williams has his loverly hero castrated in the last act, we are no more taken in than by the Brylcreem ad. Rather, as Freud said we would, in an essay ("Psychopathic Stage Characters") which should be required reading for all post-Freudian dramatists, we are inclined to send for the doctor. What about pre-Freudian literature? When Leslie Fiedler tells us black Jim and white Huck image a homosexual relationship, what happens to our feelings as we read *Huckleberry Finn?* They change, certainly, but how?

Freud, in one of his attitudes, used to say art and literature were purely of the pleasure-principle, narcotics the rational man might well do without. It is conceivable that in another fifty years or so we will all be so psychoanalytically sophisticated, so committed to the reality principle, that literature will be a thing of the past.

It is conceivable, but hardly likely. Psychoanalysts themselves, though they

## Concerning the Painting "Afternoon in Infinity" by Attilio Salemme

I saw some boards sleeping
In your high noon of the infinite.
On each you scribbled eyes, ears and a nose
And a mouth saying: "Since we are pieces of lumber,
We rest here.
Had we been lucky, and on another canvas,
We would be men, clasping the bride Time."

HYAM PLUTZIK



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can interpret them, still laugh at jokes, still read novels and go to plays. Knowledge of that psychoanalytic dictionary and grammar does not somehow make our own unconscious minds vanish. Rather, psychoanalytic criticism and New Criticism complement each other. Where the New Critic tells us the social or intellectual content, the psychoanalytic critic can tell us the meaning of a work of art to a common hypothetical unconscious (which then accords or does not with our particular unconscious). In essence, artistic creation transmutes the fairly lurid, ithyphallic fantasies of the artist's unconscious into useful, acceptable social and intellectual content (for example, the quite common childhood fear of being devoured becomes Swift's "Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden"). This is the act of creation; it is also the act of response.

We respond to a literary work only partly in terms of the intellectual meaning to which conventional critics pay such heed. Our full response involves that meaning, but we also find in a work of literature fantasies which correspond to our own unconscious fantasies (these are highly personal and variable, of course, just as we all have our preferences in literature). Our total response to a work of literature is the dialectic between these two levels of meaning and unconscious fantasy. In short, where the New Critic confined himself largely to meaning, which is only part of our response, the combination of New and psychoanalytic criticism offers a description of all our response to a work of literature.

THE combination of New and psychoanalytic criticism hardly poses a threat to literature; it will, however, be a revolution on a revolution, a scientific Bolshevism on a scientistic Menshevism. The New Critics scraped aside the received form of formless, mushy, impressionistic criticism to look at the hard facts of the text. Literary criticism in the first half of the century took a new strength and hardness from the age's scientistic temper. So now, will the combination of New and psychoanalytic criticism. Inevitably, it seems to me, criticism in the next fifty years will turn from its received form, the text-as-text, to face and reason with the hard fact of our own subjectivity. This newer criticism, tougher still, will take critics back to their Edwardian heritage, the subjective response to literature, not now in a maundering impressionistic way, but rigorously, even scientifically.

*April 22, 1961*


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# New Form in the Theatre

## *Martin Esslin*

FORM-SMASHERS ought certainly to be encouraged. But at the same time we should know what is being smashed; and what is taking its place.

What is form? A set of rules or prescriptions handed down through habits of craftsmanship, academic teaching or critical practice. Some of these may be wholly arbitrary, based on considerations that have been long forgotten; others are the congealed expression of philosophical assumptions, some of which may still be valid, while others are equally forgotten and have long since become obsolete or need to be reexamined. Others again are derived from fundamental realities, such as the laws of the psychology of perception; these will resist the smashers—but even they may be swept away: for even the conditions of perception change with time. Men's wits become sharper, their eyes and ears quicker in the uptake, chords that grated on the ears of one generation may be tolerable or even beautiful to those of a later age.

So most forms may be, and should be, smashed. What we must remember, however, is that the new forms that take their place will also, inevitably, present new and different *contents*. It is a fallacy to think that there is a division between *what* is said and *how* it is said; ultimately form is content—and content form: it would be quite impossible to have the statement made by Picasso in *Guernica* repainted in the style of Rubens or Velazquez; and when Picasso did repaint *Las Meninas* of Velazquez in his own style in a long series of new paintings, these turned out to have an entirely different content. And equally you could not express the subject matter of *Hamlet* in the form of Racine or Eugene O'Neill, let alone in the form of a musical. *West Side Story* may be a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*—it certainly does not say the same thing that Shakespeare said.

To make a musical out of *Romeo and Juliet*, however, is not an act of form-smashing: it is a perfectly traditional method of taking inspiration from the theme of an older work. The form-smashers aim at breaking up the basic rules of the art form itself.

Let us take a simple example of an established aesthetic dogma smashed—and not by revolutionaries either. For decades the aesthetics of the cinema were based on the traditional proportions of the screen; the origins of these were wholly arbitrary, probably due to such accidents as the format of the first cameras, or the standard size of film made available by industry to the early film makers. Once cinema houses around the world were equipped with screens of a certain size and shape, it became extremely difficult to change the proportions of the picture projected, and the original coincidence was elevated into a formal principle that seemed destined to assume eventually the sacred stature of an eternal aesthetic law; film theoreticians accepted it and derived their philosophies from it. If a few directors, like Abel Gance, rebelled against it in one or two films, they could not move the established principle. Yet the day came when technical developments and economic forces coincided; when the competition of television created a demand for more spectacle and larger vistas, and technical developments in the form of various wide-screen and panoramic processes were at hand. So Cinemascope and Cinerama smashed what, a bare half-century after the birth of the cinema, had come to be regarded as its basic form. It now became possible to create a much wider picture within a frame of different shape—or even a picture so large that its edges lay outside the field of vision of a pair of eyes focused on the center, so that it became possible to suggest an unframed picture, as that perceived when we are looking at reality itself.

But it was soon apparent that these new forms must present a different type of content. On the Cinemascope screen, montage and quick cutting, which make up the basic grammar of the language of the normal cinema, become much more difficult, simply because it takes much longer to absorb a wider picture and therefore quicker cutting would be bewildering. In Cinerama, which attempts an illusion of reality itself, quick cutting is found to give the audience a violent physical jolt and be positively uncomfortable. So, on that very large screen, the picture has to be almost as stable as in the old live theatre; the real value of the process lies in the purveying of landscape: one type of content, the travelogue alone, ideally fits that particular new form.

In other words: the old form has not been smashed; it has not been superseded. The language of the cinema has been extended in one particular direction. If the new very large screen process became the only standard of cinematic art, we should have lost a valuable form of expression.

THIS certainly is a very humble, and a very limited example. But it makes its point; the origins of an aesthetic may be arbitrary, but once the arbitrary step has been taken, it sets up its own framework of by no means arbitrary rules which are dependent on the psychological and perceptual basis of the experience involved. Thus the origins of Greek tragedy are still obscure: we do not know *why* it was originally confined to one actor and chorus, to which another actor, and later—by a daring and revolutionary innovation—a third were added. It was certainly a highly arbitrary form. Yet it is from these limitations that the character—and range of expressiveness—of Greek tragedy stemmed. And it was a form perfectly adapted to the content it was designed to express. But to that content only.

Yet it was from that very limited, and arbitrarily limited, art form that Aristotle deduced what were for cen-

*MARTIN ESSLIN is the author of* Brecht: the Man and His Work (*Doubleday*). *His new book,* The Theatre of the Absurd (*Doubleday, Anchor*) *is due later this year.*

## The Nature

what right
do I have
to love you

what right
do I have
to be sing-

ing
no right no
I sing to sing

assured of
nothing
hoping

that you may
gracefully
know why

the body
made of
expression

expresses
its make
in love
why

the poem
says always
poem

CID CORMAN



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turies regarded as the immovable laws of the aesthetics of drama. At that point a tyranny of form was established. For it is a fatal fallacy when principles deduced from existing works of art *a posteriori* are elevated into *a priori* rules. For many centuries, while certain aspects have changed, it has been considered an eternal principle that the drama must imitate nature, that it is based on a plot with a beginning, a middle and a solution, and on the delineation of characters that must be consistent throughout the action.

It is against this form that the *avant-garde* movement in the theatre rebels: Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Harold Pinter and a host of other dramatists. Some of them have written plays that lack plot, others have created characters that lack consistency and change their personality completely in the course of an evening: not by logical development, but arbitrarily. They have written plays that start without a formal exposition and end without a solution. In other words they have produced a theatre that, by that *a priori* definition of the theatre, is neither possible nor permissible and could certainly not be successful. Yet, undoubtedly, these authors have written for the stage and they have been successful.

THIS IS a case where some of the rules of form have not only been revealed as arbitrary, but where, moreover, the philosophical assumptions on which the convention rested have changed. Plays with a rationally constructed plot that start from the exposition of a problem, moral, social or philosophical, and then proceed toward a solution presuppose a world order that is rational and known to man. Characters that remain consistent throughout the development of an action presuppose that each individual has something like an immutable and eternal essence of which all his various manifestations from the cradle to the grave are temporal and more or less fortuitous modifications: in other words that each individual has his immortal essence, his immortal soul.

For the *avant-garde* in the theatre of today neither of these basic assumptions holds good: they see the world as essentially mysterious and unintelligible, certainly devoid of rational purpose and hence of clearly deducible rules of conduct. And these authors have also digested the findings of modern psychology which sees human character, not as an eternal essence, but as the sum of physiological and psychological factors that are in constant flux. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* Pozzo appears as a self-confident and overbearing man at one moment, as a blind and defeated man at another. No explanation is given for the change; there is even room to doubt that the two manifestations of personality are the same man. In Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* men change into beasts without warning or explanation, the victims of a psychological and physiological change that is regarded as a disease. With the loss of intelligible purpose in the universe and with the disappearance of consistent character, the drama can no longer be an equation starting from a number of known constants and working toward a solution of the unknown factors according to a well-established and sure formula. We now work with a much higher number of unknown factors and the certainty that there is no easy solution.

Here, then, in contrast to the merely technical change in the example from the cinema, we are faced not so much with an *attack* on an arbitrary form as with its internal collapse. To these *avant-garde* authors the traditional form of the theatre no longer makes sense because it is based on implied philosophical assumptions in which they no longer believe. This is why, say, the usual Soviet play, or the Victorian melodrama strikes us as unconvincing: it expresses systems of values that have, to us, lost their relevance. But so, to the *avant-garde* in the contemporary theatre, have the basic, unspoken and implied assumptions of the usual drawing room comedy or socially relevant play, with its careful delineation of character and neat solution. To a writer like Beckett, Ionesco or Pinter, the fact that boy gets girl in the last act, or that the desirability of racial tolerance is convincingly demonstrated, is irrelevant. The boy and the girl still face an absurd universe; no social reform will alter its mysteriousness. By tackling a small, and to them irrelevant, segment of the reality of the human situation, the conventional theatre presents a distorted and unreal picture.

THE attack on the *form* of the traditional theatre is thus revealed as an attack on its *content*. And if a play attempts to deal with the new content in the conventional form of logical construction, consistent characterization and coherent language, the implied assumptions behind its form will belie its apparent content. In that sense even the blackest existentialist plays of Sartre and Camus, which present a philosophy closely akin to that of the plays of Beckett and Ionesco, contradict their explicit content by the implied content

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that shines through their logical and traditional construction.

The identity of form and content is even clearer in the most obvious aspect of the attack the *avant-garde* dramatists have launched against the traditional theatre: their resolute destruction of language and discursive thought on the stage. For one of the main contents of this theatre is the demonstration of the difficulties of communication between human beings—the inadequacy of language in establishing contact. Here, too, the smashing of form expresses a changed philosophical basis: the time has passed when an identity was believed to exist between the structure of language, the structure of logic and the structure of reality. That is the content expressed by the formal means of the dissolution of logical discourse in the *avant-garde* theatre.

THE FORM-SMASHERS of the contemporary theatre, therefore, are anything but frivolous iconoclasts. They are expressing fundamental changes in contemporary thought—and they are expressing them in the only way that will give them adequate expression in terms of the stage. In doing this they may not be destroying the traditional basis of the theatre, but they are certainly adding a new dimension to it, widening, in fact, the range of its content and subject matter.

For this type of *avant-garde* theatre, which has been called the Theatre of the Absurd, has opened up a new possibility for poetry on the stage. Having renounced the function of telling a story, of exploring character, of discussing ideas, of solving problems, it has been able to concentrate on the presentation of what is essentially a *sense of being*, an intuition of the tragi-comic absurdity and mystery of human existence. As such the Theatre of the Absurd is an existentialist theatre which puts a direct perception of a mode of being above all abstract considerations; it is also essentially a poetic, a lyrical theatre: for the expression of intuitions of being is the field of lyrical poetry. So, paradoxically, the theatre that attacks language, and above all language that is beautiful and poetical for its own sake, is a deeply poetical theatre: only, its poetry is a poetry of situation, movement and concrete imagery, not one of language. Plays like *Waiting for Godot* or Ionesco's *The Chairs* eminently prove this point.

So, in this field at least, the form-smashers are not form-smashers at all; rather are they explorers who penetrate into new fields and open up new vistas. Instead of destroyers of old forms they are the bringers of new contents.

This is not to say that everything that seems *avant-gardist* must be good. Once the basis of a new approach has been understood, the grammar of a new kind of language learned, standards of judgment will immediately become apparent. If it is recognized that the *avant-garde* theatre is concerned with the presentation of complex imagery, with the exploration of the human condition in terms of an intuition of the mystery, the tragedy and comic absurdity of existence, then obviously its plays will have to be judged, not by any truth of character drawing or any ingenuity of plot, which they renounce, but by the quality of their imagery, the depth of their intuition, the validity of their poetic imagination.

Just as we have learned to discriminate between good and bad abstract painting, and no longer attack Picasso because he paints women with two noses when we all know that in nature they have only one, so it should be the function of drama critics to make a minimum effort to find out the terms of reference of *avant-garde* writing in the theatre and judge its works within those terms and standards. There may be some form-smashers in the *avant-garde* theatre who have nothing to say and are therefore purely negative. Any critic worth his salt should easily be able to distinguish these from the writers who smash old forms because they feel that they have become inadequate to express new contents.

And these form-smashers, certainly, ought to be encouraged.

# Return of Naturalism as the 'Avant-Garde'

## *Howard Warshaw*

FOR THE FIRST TIME in its history the United States seems to be exerting a pre-eminent influence on the art of painting. "The real impact," says Sir Herbert Read, "did not begin until 1958 with the circulation of the Museum of Modern Art's New American Painting show and the Jackson Pollock exhibition. However, since that time it has been overwhelming. Certainly the younger British painters have been swept off their feet by the discovery of what is really happening in the United States." The school of painting from which this influence comes is generally called Abstract Expressionism, and loosely encompasses such various painters as Pollock, de Kooning, Motherwell, Kline and Gottlieb, all of whom are considered *avant-garde*.

At the outset there are two factors which cast suspicion on the genuineness of the achievements claimed for this school of painting.

First: It is claimed that abstract expressionism cannot be judged by standards that would also apply to the art of the past. Thus it has become a not infrequent practice of museums to invite painters to submit their work to a jury of their own choosing, either a "traditional" jury or a "modern" jury. They do this on the assumption that there can be two systems of judgment with respect to art. But "modern" and "advanced" and "*avant-garde*" are comparative terms, and comparisons of things not seen within a single frame of reference are meaningless.

Second: Spontaneous generation as the explanation for a mature art form is suspect. The invention of a new form does not arise independently of a consideration of existing forms and techniques. The struggle to reshape the formal structure of an art so as to include a new concept in its entire pattern presages the full flowering of a truly new expression. No substantial, intervening body of work exists to show us the natural emergence of abstract expressionism from the formal character of painting. For the individual painters as well as for the school the change has tended to be abrupt.

It is painful to question the validity of our first success, but it is nevertheless the purpose of this essay to do so. For it is disconcertingly possible that our cleavage with the art of the past may be an expression not of an

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interest in art but of our disinterest in art, that we have therefore invented an art substitute which we have sold first to ourselves (well-packaged in the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim) and then to the rest of the world. Our American indifference to art, our enthusiasm, our supersalesmanship could then easily account for such a development.

One type of art substitute with which we are all familiar is a form of illustration based on a blend of nineteenth-century naturalism and photography. Norman Rockwell is the prototype of this form. Jackson Pollock is as representative of abstract expressionism as Norman Rockwell is of popular illustration and by comparing these two men I would like to show certain similarities between the two schools of painting. It is my feeling that beneath their overt differences there are startling similarities of function in these two painters. This is the meaning of my title, "Return of Naturalism as the *Avant-Garde.*"

I SHALL not use naturalism in the sense that it has been applied to certain excellent painters such as Chardin, but rather as the philosophers apply it today to a form of primitive phenomenology in which it is thought that by gathering a great deal of surface data nature may be rendered back to us in its own terms (Rockwell); or as in the doctrine of *"ding an sich,"* discredited by Kant, in which it is thought possible to completely identify a construct with its subject matter (Pollock). In either case naturalism becomes a confusion of art with nature. We need not be surprised by the difference in appearance between a Rockwell and a Pollock for as our concepts of nature change, our imitations of nature change in appearance though not in essence. What remains constant is the role of decoy by which they lead us away from the world of constructs, in which painting belongs, and back to the world of unordered private experience.

Existence is the inexorable flow of experience, infinite in details, each of which is unique. It is in fact one thing after another, and we cannot stop it in order to classify, analyze or paraphrase. It is therefore incommunicable and what each of us is going through remains desperately private. It is true that we have invented marvelous constructs, such as language and mathematics, which are meant to represent reality, or rather a little piece of reality seen from a particular point of view, and through these constructs we come to share a measure of common under-


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standing. But it is the constructs themselves we understand, not the reality they represent. Euclid's geometry does not measure the earth as its name implies, but it does measure his hypothetical plane surface.

ART IS important because it is a special kind of abstraction. Whatever else a painter is looking at while painting a picture, he is also looking at the painting itself. The painting is an actual part of the larger experience of which it is itself an abstraction. The dual nature of an abstraction in painting corresponds to: what is looked at, and the way it is seen. The painter can influence *what* we see by merely applying paint to canvas. He influences the *way* we see through the relationship of his abstraction to the larger experience on which it is predicated.

Operating in this way a painter is saying in effect, "Look through my eyes and see not only what I am looking at but the way in which I see, which is the way I am." When this occurs we have achieved communication in the deepest sense. When we can truly look through the eyes of a stranger, the word stranger no longer has meaning, and we recognize one another as brothers.

That is what we have long considered to be the purpose of art and anything else is pseudo-art. Rockwell and Pollock, each in his own way, claim our attention in the name of art only to redirect it to a mundane or a sentimental experience. When this happens the painter is no longer a man who asks us to look through his eyes and share his sense of existence. Rather he is like a man who interrupts our flow of observation to point out some *thing* he has seen. It may be something conventionally beautiful or something quite strange that we have never seen before, but in each case the element of abstraction is of such a primitive order that we share only his vantage point; he does not communicate his personal vision.

Rockwell does this by rejecting his personal vision in favor of conventionally shared sentimental attitudes. In so doing he offers us no revelations of his own, but rather encourages us to share in already existing popular ways of seeing (and also of not seeing) our life around us. As we accept its illusions, the actual painting all but disappears and with it the possibility of an abstraction. After capturing our attention by graphic illusions which we are accustomed to equate with reality, he allows it to ricochet to a recollection of an anecdote or an event which he relies upon us to have shared with him, for example a Thanksgiving dinner.

POLLOCK on the other hand presents us with the turkey itself. "What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event," says Harold Rosenberg, a spokesman for the abstract expressionists. We see the event that Pollock produced for us, but do we see it through his eyes?

How does one create an event on a piece of canvas? The question must really be: how can one paint without creating an event? I have seen a Pollock which consists of one blob of blue paint thrown on to a white canvas, and this I take it satisfies the conditions of an event; that is, the event of paint being thrown on the canvas. When Rembrandt applies paint to canvas is it any less an event? According to the new critics it is not what they mean by an event because, in addition to being paint on canvas, it also resembles something else, a woman let us say. The desire of the abstract expressionist seems to be for the paint on the canvas to be the only event overtly contrived by the painter. It must have no purposeful coefficient in the world of larger experiences, but without coefficients relating across two systems there can be no abstraction. And without abstraction the painter cannot impose his personal vision. Ironically, abstract expressionism is the least abstract form of painting yet contrived. It is what it is. In the sense that we

## Prism

*a paperweight*

Having lately taken up residence
In a suite of chambers
Windless, compact and bright, ideal
Lodging for the pituitary gland of Euclid
If not for a "single gentleman (references),"
You have grown used to the playful inconveniences,
The floors that slide from under you helter-skelter,
Invisible walls put up in mid-
Stride, leaving you warped for the rest of the day,
A spoon in water; also that pounce
Of wild color from corner to page,
Straightway consuming the latter
Down to your very signature,
After which there is nothing to do but retire,
Licking the burn, into—into—
Look: (Heretofore
One could have said where one was looking,
In or out. But now it almost—) Look:
You dreamed of this:
To fuse in borrowed fires, to drown
In depths that were not there. You meant
To rest your bones in a maroon plush box
And doze out the old play of mind and object,
Little foreseeing their effect on you,
Those dagger-eyed, insatiate performers
Who from the first false insight
To the most recent betrayal of outlook,
Crystal, hypnotic atom,
Have held you rapt, the proof, the child
Wanted by neither. Now and then
It is given to see clearly. There
Is what remains of you, a body
Unshaven, flung on the sofa. Stains of egg
Harden about the mouth, smoke still
Rises between fingers or from nostrils.
Your eyes deflect the stars through years of vacancy.
Your agitation at such moments
Is all too human. You and the stars
Seem both endangered, each
At the other's utter mercy. But the gem
Revolves in space, the vision shuttles off.
A toneless waltz glints through the pea-sized funhouse.
The day is breaking someone else's heart.

JAMES MERRILL



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believe a painting to be realistic to the extent that it resembles its subject matter, both Rockwell and Pollock are realists. Rockwell, because he bridges the gap between his canvas and his subject by his consummate skill at making illusions; Pollock, because there is no gap. Paint on canvas *is* his subject matter. We see the painting not through his eyes but through our own, as we would look at any other individual datum, contrived or otherwise.

Oddly enough, critical supporters of abstract expressionism are willing to concede all this but claim it as a particular value of the form. Sir Herbert Read, an enthusiastic supporter, says, "One of the great virtues of abstract expressionism is the freedom of association it permits." I suspect the freedom he enjoys here is the freedom from the responsibility of sharing the vision of the painter; the freedom from abstraction. Abstraction is a difficult process. We are creatures of flesh and it is an act of asceticism to communicate in essences. We are tempted (in the pious name of art appreciation) to drop back into the easier reality of particulars where in any case we conduct the great bulk of our lives.

But it is only by sharing the *particular* vision of a painter that we are able to share his paintings with one another. It is only by virtue of what we are able to see in common that painting takes its place on the common ground of culture. Those paintings which we have been able to share and which we have agreed over a long period are meaningful to us constitute what T. S. Eliot calls, "an ideal order of existing monuments modified however slightly by the addition of a new (a truly new) work." A genuine *avant-garde* would extend this "ideal order" to allow for images pertinent to the particular revelations of its time.

"They are painting as though no one had ever painted before," is a remark of approbation quoted in a recent catalogue published by a major university and is an example of the spirit with which we neglect this responsibility.

FAILURE to accept the opportunity to earn a sense of the whole tradition means a loss of the common ground. Painting is losing its language-like social attributes and becoming a private challenge to each man to see how well or how long he can navigate in his own infinitesimal corner. The safety and certainty of the unique gesture are substitutes for the gamble on the *extra*-ordinary. The spirit in which Tintoretto could say, "I want to paint with the drawing of Michelangelo and the color of Titian," in which every man was free to walk the length and breadth of the common ground, has been replaced by a scuttling into private corners, each man defending his minuscule gesture. One paints only horizontal stripes, another only vertical. Turn one on end and they impinge on each other; put them together, they intrude on Mondrian.

In our present atmosphere painters are driven to romantic and infantile excesses, one might better say minimums, in a quest for uniqueness. They seek the inner voice in the area of elemental impulse and automatic action. They are embarrassingly personal without being distinctive because in our most primitive and automatic instincts we are all very much alike. Robert Motherwell, no doubt obeying his inner voice with scrupulous honesty, was moved to paint (or write) a series of canvases consisting principally of the written message, "*Je t'aime.*" (I wonder if some painter might apply for the translation rights and paint the English "I love you.") Critical response was favorable: "a cry to woman, to the wilderness, to France." Or Motherwell in a symposium, What Art Means To Me, at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951:

> . . . The feeling of being unwedded to the universe, a desire to reunite. The need is for a felt experience intense, immediate, direct, subtle, unified, warm, vivid, rhythmic—everything that might dilute the experience is stripped away. I love painting the way one loves the body of a woman. If painting must have an intellectual and social background it is only to enhance an essentially warm simple radiant act for which everyone has a need.

There is little doubt that there is something on his mind, but it is not painting. He is again confusing art with nature.

At times it seems that we are dealing with a recessive *avant-garde*. Consider this account of the painter Mathieu written by Michel Tapie (*Art News*, February, 1954):

> And so for more than two years (with long periods of abstinence from the creative act) Mathieu, working directly with the paint tube and avoiding the facile modulations of the brush, drew signs in monochrome on absolutely unbroken backgrounds prepared by workmen in the shop where he buys his materials. Signs springing from gestures, which were in turn dictated by the urge to vehemence and violence.

With respect to the above it is interesting to turn to Camus. In his essay,

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"The Rebel," he compares rebellion, seen as a positive action against interference with his values, with a "completely negative concept like that of resentment" as defined by Scheler: "Auto-intoxication—the evil secretion in a sealed vessel of prolonged impotence."

In Selden Rodman's recent book, *Conversations with Artists*, Adolph Gottlieb is quoted:

> We are going to have perhaps a thousand years of non-representational painting. . . . Abstraction is not a limitation but a liberation. The social realist wants to charm you or win you over. But the abstract expressionist says to the public (more honestly): You're stupid. We despise you. We don't WANT you to like us —or our art. . . . What is the function of the art school today? To confuse the student. To make a living for the teacher.

At the time of the publication of this statement Mr. Gottlieb was teaching at the Pratt Institute. As there is Christ and anti-Christ, so there is art and anti-art. Just as devils, witches and the Black Mass are linked to the cathedral and church doctrine, so the anti-arts (as distinguished from the merely apathetic) seem irresistibly drawn to the schools and museums and to the rites, rights, and writing of art. This is particularly dangerous when the powers of promotion are so strong that they need assign no more than one idea to a given subject at a given time to monopolize the interest of their audience.

As painters have bit by bit relinquished their prerogatives, their common ground, the critics have inflated themselves to fill the vacant territory. Now it frequently seems that a painting is merely a kind of automatic starter for the critic whose actions prove essentially autotelic. They have become a group of virtuoso viewers.

Let me quote Sir Herbert Read in "Dialogue on Modern U.S. Painting" (*Art News*, May, 1960):

> The Sonia Getchtoff (*Friends and Lovers*, 1958) is very rich and very sensuous. It has almost a tropical exuberance, the richness of exotic plants. Here again I must pause and make one generalization. When I present my own associations to these paintings, I am always conscious of the fact that these may be utterly irrelevant to the artist's intent. However, these associations are still important to me in terms of my total reaction to the work of art. I think it is un-

## The Path

I

To stand on common ground
here and there gritty with pebbles
yet elsewhere 'fine and mellow —
uncommon fine for ploughing'

there to labor
planting the vegetable words
diversely in their order
that they come to virtue!

To reach those shining pebbles
that soil where uncommon men
have labored in their virtue
and left a store

of seeds for planting!
To crunch on words
grown in grit or fine
crumbling earth, sweet

to eat and sweet
to be given, to be eaten
in common, by laborer
and hungry wanderer . . .

II

In time of blossoming —
of red
buds, of red
margins upon
white petals among the
new green, of coppery

leaf-buds still weakly
folded, fuzzed
with silver hairs

when on the grass verges
or elephant-hide rocks, the lunch-hour
expands, the girls
laugh at the sun, men
in business suits awkwardly
recline, the petals
float and fall into

crumpled wax-paper, cartons
of hot coffee —

to speak as the sun's
deep tone of May gold speaks
or the spring chill in the rock's shadow
a piercing minor scale running across the flesh
aslant — or petals
that dream their way
(speaking by being white
by being
curved, green-centered, falling
already while their tree
is half-red with buds) into

human lives! Poems stirred
in paper coffee-cups, eaten
with petals on rye in the
sun — the cold shadows in back,
and the traffic grinding the
borders of spring — entering
human lives forever,
unobserved, a spring element . . .

III

*". . . everything in the world must excel itself to be itself."*
Pasternak

Not 'common speech'
a dead level
but the uncommon speech of paradise,
tongue in which oracles
speak to beggars and pilgrims:

not illusion but what Whitman called
'the path
between reality and the soul',
a language
excelling itself to be itself

speech akin to the light
with which at day's end and day's
renewal, mountains
sing to each other across the cold valleys.

DENISE LEVERTOV



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doubtedly true that the less a painting is representational, and the more it moves towards abstract forms, the more a spectator is able to find his own individual associations.

Carried to a logical conclusion the above remarks would obviate the purpose of art criticism, since a painting would be something quite different to each person seeing it. If the critic presents us with his own private associations, it must be only because he is particularly good at having them; that is a virtuoso viewer.

It is time to reconsider the role of art criticism and some of the concepts on which our "new" painting is based. Santayana says, "The man who cannot remember history is doomed to repeat it." A critical opinion, detached from the cumulative wisdom of the past, is susceptible to naive errors about the past as well as naive "discoveries" in the present. An error in judgment about the value of Franz Kline may arise from an error in judgment about Rembrandt.

I BELIEVE that a particularly revealing error of this sort was made by Harold Rosenberg in an influential article written for *Art News*, December, 1952, in which he introduced the term "action painting."

> Getting inside the canvas — at a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act rather than a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.
>
> It is pointless to argue that Rembrandt or Michelangelo worked in the same way. You don't get Lucrece with a dagger out of staining a piece of cloth or spontaneously putting forms into motion upon it. She had to exist some place else before she appeared on the canvas — and the paint was Rembrandt's means for bringing her here. Now everything must have been in the tubes, in the painter's muscles, and in the cream colored sea into which he dives. If Lucrece should come out she will be among us for the first time — a surprise. To the painter she must be a surprise. In this mood there is no point in an act if you already know what it contains.

I do not believe Mr. Rosenberg is in error about the intentions and desires of his contemporaries whom he knows well. He is in error in not seeing the same aims and desires operating as part of the much more complex situation in which Rembrandt worked. He has detached perennial values of the art of painting and presents them in isolation from their natural context. Unable to read them in Rembrandt (it is far from "pointless to argue" this) he has a sense of discovering something new, which must inevitably lead to naive and oversimplified acts. Specifically, he is in error about the nature of subject matter. The error consists in believing that apples are the subject matter of certain paintings by Cézanne, or that a woman is the subject matter of the *Mona Lisa*, or that whatever the extra painting reference happens to be, it is the subject matter of the painting.

In fact, the subject matter of painting is the whole situation in which the painter works: the man, his vision, his act of painting, his materials, the room in which he works and everything in it, all these things in interaction comprise the subject matter of the painting. The subject matter is a process, which goes on while he is at work, rather than a static posed object. How much the painter is willing to allow to the situation in which he works is determined by the scope of the man, and this in turn determines the scope of his subject matter. The man himself entering his working situation may choose to admit only his instinctual automatic impulses, or he may elect to retain these impulses and in addition come to the job as an intelligent, remembering, social and cultured person. He may see his materials only as paint and canvas, or he may read into these inherited tools the history of what other men have done with them. He may exercise his vision only on the phenomena of the paint on the canvas, or he may choose to engage his eye with the figure of a woman holding a dagger in addition to the paint on canvas.

Kline's impulse to stain a cloth arises from his engagement with his working situation in quite the same way that Rembrandt's impulse to apply paint to his canvas arises from his engagement with his working situation. Once the stain appears, it becomes part of the subject matter to which the painter reacts in order to make his next move. As such it is quite as palpable a reality as a woman holding a dagger. The word nonobjective has taken on mystical overtones as though by being nonobjective we are able to deal with the magically nonexistent. Sir Herbert Read speaks of the power of abstract expressionism to make visible the invisible, but this is precisely what Rembrandt has done for us. When we see a paint-


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ing by Rembrandt we do not see a woman but rather a mode of vision and behavior revealed to us and to Rembrandt himself for the first time. His vision and his responses to it were invisible until they were made manifest in the sensuous analogue of the painting. When Rembrandt draws a woman, his refined, linear vision wanders across her terrain, passes through the verbal compartments of leg and shoulder, penetrates her volume and emerges on the other side while his hand does analogous things to the paper. His eye and his mind behind it are entirely caught up in the unpredictable dialogue going on between the changing events on the paper and his developing vision of the woman. He is acting with the urgency and responsibility of a whole man attempting to meet the emergency of a given moment of his experience. He is not only an action painter but in the fullest sense of the word he is acting like a man. Since we are committed without choice to the appalling tightrope walk of balancing between remote thinking and immediate sensation, no less complete an action than this will serve us as an encouraging example.

If we fail to understand this concept, if we imagine that the subject matter of Rembrandt's drawing is the woman (a naturalistic concept of Rosenberg's), we must either attempt to bring the woman here by means of paint or dismiss her. It would seem that the new critical apparatus, far from disengaging us from the past, offers us time-honored values which seem new and strange only because they appear in isolation, and are reduced to their minimum function. And this reduction effects a qualitative change.

FINALLY, we must consider the problem of the spectator of art in these confusing times, since we all, as spectators, have certain responsibilities.

Pictures serve many purposes. They may remind us or inform us about things. There is nothing wrong in a man who likes boats enjoying a picture of a boat. But he must try to discover whether or not he enjoys the whole picture, which includes the reference to the boat, or merely his own thoughts about boats. Similarly we may like to be incited to fancies, to be provoked to free associations derived from shapes, lines and colors. But again we must try to discover whether it is the whole picture we know or merely our own reveries.

Pictures may be decorative. They may provide pleasing sensations for our eyes. A contrived datum may be as pleasing sensuously as a tree or a mountain. Sensation, however, involves only sight, and painting at its best is concerned with vision. A great painter allows us to look through his eyes and for a moment to share his sense of existence. The way he looks at things may be at times frightening or baffling because he tries to see without the support of "meaning." If he thought that he already knew what something was he would be unable to see it. To share this vision with him is often an unsettling experience. We are reluctant. It is safer to know than to see. He challenges us as does Camus to accept the absurdity of the world and to bear the responsibility of imparting meaning to experience.

I have earlier suggested that Jackson Pollock and Norman Rockwell have in common "startling similarities of function" and that we use their work as a substitute for a more demanding engagement with painting. If, which I doubt, time should prove that Pollock is a master, the proof would have to take the form: that he had not "freed" us from tradition but is himself a part of it, susceptible of evaluation in the same field of reference with Michelangelo and Picasso; that his paintings are not merely the evidence of events; that they do impose his personal vision and therefore that they are not just provocative material for the practice of free association. In short he would be appreciated for entirely different reasons than those now advanced for him. It is these current reasons that concern me. The fine arts, in that they allow us to share profound experience, are a force for the integration of society. We are now being led by critical opinion which argues for the partitioning of the tradition and for the separateness of the spectator's experience.

# Poetry in an Age of Expansion

**Robert Bly**

WE CAN SEE the tracks of iconoclasm today, but the animal itself is rarely seen. We live instead in a time of praise. Our situation is the result of *lack* of iconoclasm for forty years. No picture is more false than that of continual breaking of forms in American writing. The flaccid affirmation of *The New York Times Book Review* extends also into the fields of fiction and poetry.

Why should so many tracks of iconoclasts be seen, particularly nineteenth-century ones, and so few iconoclasts be caught today? I have tried to think of a few reasons. A feeling of constriction was habitual in the nineteenth century. Men felt this mood in the streets, inside poems and in drawing rooms. Jane Austen described the struggle inside young girls in England between the impulses of their nature and certain ideas imposed by society upon their class, such as the necessity for a rich husband. Rimbaud describes the thousand ways he felt constricted and bound in: he was suffocated by his town, the alexandrine line, the usual subject matter, the stanza; he rebels against his family, the Second Empire, "ideals," the literary society and Europe. Such rebellion was a political and also a magic act that took away the feeling of constriction. No division existed necessarily between politics and literature. A rebel against the upper class or against class forms in general might also rebel against certain forms in poetry. Whitman is a good example. He broke the old idea of the poem, and also announced the end of class in society. In my opinion, the whole iconoclastic tradition through Ibsen and LaForgue emerges from this feeling of constriction, felt every day in the consciousness.

Now our condition is the reverse. It is not a mood of constriction that troubles us, but its reverse—a mood of infinite expansion. By the "mood of expansion" I mean that we are half-conscious that too many babies are being born on earth, that cities are expanding, businesses are joining, publishers are merging, corporations growing bigger and bigger. Even ideas expand: industrialists become interested in Negroes and have liberal ideas, Continental Can supports Plato, old-time radicals believe in free enterprise—the living room of the thought expands to include everything. This expansion dominates morals, cool music, the mood of the country. It is the subject of all of Jack Kerouac's novels. An American picks up a car in Chicago and leaves it in New York, moving on to Mexico. Moral ideas ex-

*ROBERT BLY'S poems have been published in* Botteghe Oscure, The London Magazine, New World Writing, Paris Review *and others. He is founder and editor of* The Sixties, *a magazine of "poetry and opinion."*



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## Sunday in Glastonbury

It is out in the flimsy suburbs,
Where the light seems to shine through
the walls.

My black shoes stand on the floor
Like two open graves.

The curtains do not know what to hope
for,
But they are obedient.

How strange to think of India!
Wealth is nothing but lack of people.

CHARLES REYNOLDS

pand: it is not wrong to steal; leaving women is good; the important thing is to keep moving. The novel is well titled *On the Road.* Everyone wants to be in a gaseous, not a solid, state. The young business executive is troubled, just as the Beat writer is, by the expansion of his own ego, which seems nearly ready to fill the whole universe. This mood of expansion, uncontrollable expansion, troubles us just as its opposite, a mood of constriction, troubled those in the nineteenth century.

The fact that constriction was felt daily in the nineteenth century, and expansion in the twentieth, makes these centuries two different worlds. Our view of ourselves, however, is still modeled on the contracting world of the nineteenth century. Kerouac, for instance, compares himself to Rimbaud, although Kerouac is actually well-adjusted and riding the tide, as Rimbaud was not. Consider Rimbaud: he attacked the constriction around him in all ways—by attacking the old form, the old content, and even the old life, refusing to live in the constriction of Europe, and going to Africa. His life has a power and unity. Our attitude toward "expansion" is more ambiguous. Ginsberg embodies the expansion around him in his form, attacks it in his content, calling it "Moloch," and lives happily with it in his life. His is the general American view.

The expansion troubles us, but we like the jazzy way of life and don't want to give it up. *Time* magazine praises expansion in business. What is most destructive in American life is praised the most.

A man who praises what destroys him can believe anything. We want to believe that American chaos is good—in fact, that it is some kind of order. All sides agree on this. Consequently, the most impossible thoughts on the subject of freedom and order are spoken and accepted. If you say to many people today that drug addiction is freedom, they will listen carefully. In the universities men say that only a poem which has submitted to the discipline of a set form is really free. Teachers say that rhyme is a form of freedom. Richard Wilbur has said that the strength of a genie comes from its being confined in a bottle. I have to say I don't believe any of this.

Recent statements about poetry tend to be a union of irreconcilable ideas, such as: Bad America is Good. For example, to build a line on *breath* is one thing, but to say that breath is meter is another. Intellectually, the Beat position is that spontaneity is the same thing as form, American expansiveness is Zen intensity, narcotic addiction is romantically struggling freedom. Ginsberg, for instance, said, "The junkie in America has the same position as the Jew in Nazi Germany." To say that chaos is order is again to praise what is destroying you, and to enter into real confusion.

THE university or scholastic poets experience the same expansiveness of American life. They react to it differently in their *work,* however: they attempt with fanatic fervor to reimpose old form on the material, as if that would somehow take away the sense of expansion. I am thinking of Richard Wilbur, John Hollander, Thom Gunn, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Howard Nemerov, Yvor Winters and others. The comparison may not be entirely fair, but this group arrives at a position seemingly opposite, though in reality similar, to that of the Beats. Their position might be roughly stated as the belief that form is the same thing as spontaneity, reason is wildness, Apollonianism is Dionysianism, meter is breath, and at last, order is chaos. Richard Wilbur is a fine poet, yet in the title poem of his volume *Ceremony,* he says in effect that ceremony is wildness:

> Ho-hum. I am for wit and wakefulness,
> And love this feigning lady of Bazille.
> What's lightly hid is deepest understood,
> And when with social smile and formal dress
> She teaches leaves to curtsey and quadrille,
> I think there are most tigers in the wood.

This is the same as his statement that the strength of the genie comes from his being confined in a bottle. In fact, the genie's strength is inborn in his nature and has no connection with his being in the bottle; moreover, while


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actually in the bottle he has no power at all. In the universities the tendency is to say that land is water.

This habit of gluing together contradictory ideas is also ingrained in the business community. During the recent anti-trust trial, the defense lawyers declared that General Electric had forbidden price-fixing, and the executives in question had disobeyed. Counsel defended these executives, therefore, as "non-conformists."

If it is true, then, that our prominent poets maintain that a spade is a hoe, we must admit that we are dealing not with iconoclasm, but with intellectual bankruptcy.

Iconoclasm was a powerful force in the nineteenth century. It was a way out of the thicket of constriction. The poem, after all, is a little society. The poet said, See, I have broken the forms in my poem, and the essence remains. Do the same, and the essence of society will remain. Rimbaud took this magic act, Ibsen also. That is why the iconoclastic artist was hated by the industrialist of the nineteenth century. Today the poem still remains a little society. When a university poet such as Richard Wilbur, however, takes this material and reimposes upon it the old form, that act hasn't the same importance. We know that modern society cannot be made livable by the imposition of form. That is why the university poet has lost the profound connection to society that the old iconoclastic poet had.

In short, nothing we can do today with *form* will suggest to the instincts a way to better society, or take away our own sense of infinite expansion.

It is with these ideas in mind that I say the emphasis on iconoclasm is out of place here. We are trying to describe a totally new situation with terms left over from the nineteenth century. The breaking of forms, in the poem and in society, has already taken place, and the reimposition of forms is a failure. No one has yet figured out how to approach what I have called "expansion."

IF AMERICA were truly iconoclastic in thought, the ideas suggested by the names Ransom, I. A. Richards, Eliot and Warren would long ago have been replaced by other ideas. Such supplanting is natural. Let me mention a few old ideas still current: the opinion that any idea is true if it results in great literature, associated with I. A. Richards; the "unpublic" nature of modern poetry, associated with Ransom; the concept that the poet's ideas are of no importance, associated with T. S. Eliot, as is the idea of the "necessary impersonality" of the poet. This last idea is utterly untenable when reading the great poetry written in this century by Neruda, Vallejo, Jiménez and other Spanish poets—and yet the idea still stands. The hollowness of Henry Miller is held up by Karl Shapiro. Men like John Crowe Ransom receive no criticism at all. Ransom is obviously a sensitive man, but the isolationism of the *Kenyon Review* under his editorship has weakened American poetry, and he cannot be praised forever for that. If we look at the prose of our finest poets, Lowell and Wilbur, for example, we find that they never criticize the ideas of a man older than themselves. An over-politeness paralyzes the country. If the first-rate writers do not criticize the long-standing ideas, the third-rate ones never will.

Harold Rosenberg and Kenneth Rexroth are both iconoclasts, and I respect them. Despite their influence, however, the old ideas are rarely examined; their work is strong but their mood does not penetrate far. None of the major schools of American verse are iconoclastic in ideas. Kenneth Rexroth has praised the Black Mountain school highly, and I think the Black Mountain poetry is of very high quality, but it can by no means be described as iconoclastic. The Black Mountain poets are not interested in overturning older ideas or men, but in carrying farther certain ideas of old men such as Pound and Williams. The academic poets carry out the ideas of still older men. The Beat poets are not seriously enough interested in any ideas to be iconoclastic. Their only idea is that we should hate the squares, but that is an idea their fathers had. Everyone in the thirties was called on to hate the industrialists. All the squares have now become industrialists. In *Tradition of the New,* Harold Rosenberg has said that there is no younger generation, but there is only one generation, beginning in the thirties. That is true. The Beat writers are the tail end of that generation, and their ideas are ideas of the thirties. The old ideas are allowed to stand; the old are praised; the middle-aged are praised; the young are praised —everyone is praised. Because everyone is taken, and valued, at his own valua-

## The Brown Studio

Walking into the room
after having spent a night in the grove
by the river
its duskiness surprised me.

The dark hours I had spent under foliage,
the forms I had seen were all sombre,
even the music was distinctly shady, the water
had left me melancholy, my hands I had rinsed
were muddy. I had seen only one bird with a bright
wing, the rest were starlings,

the brownness alarmed me.

I saw the black stove, the black chair,
the black coat. I saw the easel, remembering it as
an ordinary wood tone, rather pale, I realized
it was inky, as were the drawings.

Of course you weren't there, but a photograph was.
Actually a negative. Your hair didn't show up at all.
Where that fairness had lit the open ground,

now there was an emptiness, beginning to darken.

I believed if I spoke,
if a word came from my throat
and entered this room whose walls had been turned,

it would be the color of the cape
we saw in Aix in the studio of Cézanne,
it hung near the death's head, the umbrella,
the palette cooled to grey,

if I spoke loudly enough,
knowing the arc from real to phantom,
the fall of my voice would be,
a dying brown.

BARBARA GUEST



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tion, we have the illusion of having an advanced criticism when we really haven't one; of having rebels when we have none; of being iconoclastic when we are not; of being a wild, form-smashing nation when we are really very agreeable to all the old forms we can understand.

ICONOCLASM and Vandalism might be distinguished in that the "vandal" does not understand the "ideas" or "forms" that he takes pleasure in breaking. Vandalism also involves theft, such as stealing a chalice and breaking it down to use for an ashtray or an improvised horseshoe. The Beats frequently steal poets such as Artaud, Rimbaud, or Blake, and not understanding their ideas, use them for low purposes. I must say, however, that when an academic poet takes the form of a Shakespearean sonnet, for example, and steals it without understanding it, he is performing a comparable act of theft. In the absence of vigorous thought, everyone becomes a vandal.

MY THOUGHTS on iconoclasm and vandalism have come to an end. Serious problems remain. If the iconoclasm of the nineteenth century was the opposite of constriction by form—and an escape from it—what is the opposite of expansion?

In the nineteenth century, as the social mood became more and more constricted, the poem became longer and looser: Whitman's poetry is a good example. Today, as the mood becomes more and more expansive, the poem will grow shorter and more intense. I think one can also say that it is not the form of the poem that will be changed, but the poet's life. Iconoclasm as such means nothing. The presence of great work is what matters. Whitman, Lawrence and Rimbaud, for instance, did great work because they were able to imagine something different from what existed. The content of their work, therefore, was a vision of a way of life different from the constriction they saw around them. In the same way, the content of great work today will be a vision of a way of life different from the expansion we see around us. The presence of forms—or the breaking of forms—is not central. Free verse is being written once more today. Certain

## Late

1.

Up late, ripping next day's calendar
with a drink, he pounds her
shopping bag with curses across
the room. He sees danger in its design,
a sack to contain his life;
his life, a weight he must carry
seven damned days a week.
He crushes the hands of the clock
with a business grip. This done
he arranges the parts on the carpet
and dances. He must find, he knows,
an agony of his own choice.
Cookbooks were not written
to please him. Darker covers
conceal the phrases of his needs.

2.

Conscripted by sleep, she feels the calendar
tear listlessly, making a scar on her
midnight. Darkness is only a ride across
the desert of days. Without design,
tomorrow she will walk on life
thinking herself a pivot to carry
the damp weight of each week.
On the bedside table she hears the clock
disrobe and give up time to what is done
each night on her sunbleached carpet.
In sleep, prowling her dreams, she knows
his approach. Nightly, he brings her choice
of him to bed; on her body are written
the angry bruises, locked beneath covers,
of the furtive destitution of his needs.

VERN RUTSALA


**" . . . and scientists do work for something else, though they will not always quite admit it (because they are also supposed to be humble). They work for fame. They wish both to find truth, and to be the ones who found it."**

—From "Solomon's House," by Charles C. Gillispie, in the spring issue of **The Carleton Miscellany.**

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poets and critics recently have described this free verse as being a reaction against fixed forms, as it actually was in 1915. On the contrary, free verse now is a movement into something new, and is impelled by a vision of something ahead. Strangely enough, even though the *thinking* we do about poetry seems to be caught in old ideas, American poetry among the younger poets is very vigorous. But it is an instinctive vigor, like a mouse among dark leaves, a worm that hardly ever leaves the ground, a fish glad to be in water.

The recent poetry of James Wright shows an astonishing ability to describe something that does not yet exist, something with dark wings, concerned also with privacy and solitude. Robert Creeley's poems have the intensity and compression I spoke of. Denise Levertov has fine poems, compact and dense, shading off into the instinctive. In John Logan's new book, *Ghost of the Heart*, there are strange kinds of agony, as of some long Egyptian bird. I thought Gary Snyder's meditations about cutting down the woods in Oregon, called *Myths and Texts*, published last year, infinitely superior to most hard-cover work. His work is new because it leads us to thoughts not yet thought. Robert Hazel's poetry, published so far only in magazines, moves into new areas, particularly in his political poems on Washington, D.C. There are many other poets whose work I admire tremendously. The instinctive quality that interests me in the poems is not restricted to any one school. Recent poems by Louis Simpson, particularly his strange poem, "There Is," the poems of John Haines in Alaska, "The Snow" and "The Long River" of Donald Hall, the poems of Benjamin Clemenson. It is not a matter of iconoclasm; poetry is beginning again.

# Christianity's Lost Iconoclasm

## *Gabriel Vahanian*

THE history of religion is the history of spiritual degeneration. Wherever evidence exists, it tends to support this view, despite the fact that one would not hesitate at all to agree with the anthropologist or the cultural historian that religious beliefs have on the whole become less and less barbaric and that religious practices and institutions have become more and more civilizing as well as civilized. Whatever one wishes to say about religion from any other angle, the least that can and must be done from this particular point of view is to define religion as man's attempt to cover up his sense of shame. The Swiss Pestalozzi and, today, the theologian Wilhelm Vischer have already said this. But what they have left unsaid is the direct relation between this shame, spiritual degeneration and iconoclasm.

Religion degenerates into a sense of shame as soon as it ceases to be iconoclastic. Whether this statement can be made about all religions is beyond our present scope. Certainly, it applies at least to the Christian tradition, and is relevant to an understanding of the failure of nerve characteristic of the contemporary religious climate. This failure is derived primarily from the fact that Christianity has forfeited its iconoclastic responsibility; and consequently other movements, other ideologies have assumed — one might say usurped — this essentially monotheistic function, to the extent that the very meaning of iconoclasm has been altered. It is this alteration of the term, as well as the human reality it reveals, which is deadly to the spiritual and cultural implications of faith in a transcendent God, as presented in Biblical thought. Christianity seems altogether unconcerned about this — which it would not be if it were still somewhat iconoclastic in the Biblical sense.

Indeed, the term in the Biblical sense differs greatly from its modern meaning. In common usage, iconoclasm refers today, according to the Oxford dictionary, to "the breaking or destroying of images; especially, of images and pictures set up as objects of veneration." This definition includes attitudes reflecting the whole range from the Mosaic prohibition of graven images to the anti-religious acts of totalitarianism and libertarianism alike, by way of the puritanical distrust of the senses common to Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity. Basically, however, the contemporary meaning of iconoclasm is related to two distinct attitudes: on the one hand, the anti-artistic drive of Catholic as well as Protestant puritanism; on the other hand, the Promethean or blasphemous revolts against the monotheism of the Christian tradition. The first of these attitudes is typified by André Gide when he remembered that, due to his puritan upbringing, for a long time he had represented "the Protestant, the anti-artist, the enemy." An example of the second attitude may be found in Baudelaire, who exclaimed: "Peter denied his Master? . . . He did right!" For Baudelaire considered that love is as "august" a religion as any, especially when it vindicates man. He wrote:

> Which of the gods will dare thy judge to be,
> And to condemn thy brow with labour pale,
> Not having balanced in his golden scale
> The flood of tears thy brooks poured in the sea?
> Which of the gods will dare thy judge to be?
>
> What boot the laws of just and unjust?

We cannot here establish whether there is a connection between the Puritan and the Promethean versions of iconoclasm. The subject is too technical, much too intricately theological. Likewise, we cannot trace the possible relations between either kind of iconoclasm and the radical iconoclasm of Biblical thought. We shall, instead, concern ourselves with the contention that the base itself of Biblical thought consists of an unadulterated iconoclasm and that by contrast Christianity is no longer or not sufficiently iconoclastic.

IT IS necessary, first, to clarify a fundamental divergence between the modern, i.e., Promethean, and the Biblical meanings of the term. Briefly, modern iconoclasm is an anti-divine ejaculation, whereas the Biblical form is a debunking of man's natural inclination to deify himself, or his society, or the state, or his culture. In this light, any reader of the Bible will be able to discern the relentless debunking of this manifold, constant proclivity to elevate the finite to the level of the infinite, to attribute to the transitory the status of the permanent, and to man qualities that will deceive him into denying his finitude. In short, Biblical iconoclasm is directed against any latent or overt self-deification and against ethnolatry in any one of its forms, racial, national, cultural. Biblical iconoclasm is directed against man's most subtle and degenerate idol — himself. Whenever this is overlooked, the particularity of Bibli-

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cal thought is by the same token grievously by-passed.

Indeed, this particularity can be seen from the first to the last book of the Bible. The myths of man's creation in the image of God and of the Last Judgment are misunderstood when they are not grasped as implying a conception of man which is the direct antithesis to all sorts of human apotheoses. Unlike common sense, pretension to deity is equally distributed among men. But the Biblical position is clear: man is not God and, especially, he may not pull divine rank on his fellow men. For the same reasons, neither nature nor history, which has a beginning and an end, is endowed with divinity.

Similarly, the rejection of ethnolatry is unambiguously stated throughout the Bible. Perhaps the most explicit statement is to be found in the Prophets' exposé of the mass religiosity of their day: from being a chosen people, Israel had now come to the point where it conceived itself as a nation *choosing* its own god, forgetting that it was God who chose Israel. The Prophets unmasked and condemned the ethnolatry which was paralyzing Israel, and will paralyze any nation. A similar condemnation of ethnolatry, though it may be implicit rather than explicit, is to be found in the New Testament myth of the incarnation and of the fulfillment of the messianic hope in Jesus. National messianism, of the type which, Christians claim, Jesus did not represent, is another variant of ethnolatry. Saint Paul himself was repudiating the last vestiges of ethnolatrous messianism when he contended that in his understanding of the incarnation "there is neither Greek nor Jew." And Paul implemented his opinion by arguing that pagan converts to Christianity need not be first circumcised, in accordance with Jewish law, to become full members of the Christian community.

IT WOULD be easy to show this same anti-idolatrous strain in the works of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, Luther and Calvin. Varied and even conflicting as their respective positions may be, they have one thing in common: a loyalty to the principle that Biblical faith is monotheistic and demands a correlatively radical opposition to all divinization of symbolic events or institutions as well as of man himself. "When the principle of being is God," writes Richard Niebuhr, "then He alone is holy and ultimate sacredness must be denied to any special being. No special places, times, persons, or communities are more representative of the One than any others are. No sacred groves or temples, no hallowed kings or priests, no festival days, no chosen communities are particularly representative of Him in whom all things live

## Acclimation

After my cousin, the choir boy,
murdered his mother with bitter candy;
and after my brother, the air force hero,
ruined his wife with a linoleum cutter;
and after my neighbor ignited his house,
and my best friend took a child to his room,
their gentle faces hung like jerky
from the live ceiling my bed looked up to.

Facts seemed fatal, at the beginning,
as the raw world must have
when it was imagined
with all its teeth and dung and passion.

Time tranquilizes, and bedrooms are cozy.
I rest most nights in the fearless moonlight
as well as the choir boy or the major
in their deep cells, or the child (grown-up now)
or the empty mothers.

Each day the pound master records the dead.
Bones of kittens burn like ignorant trees.
Headlines blur after too much reading
and the patched-up ceiling turns to mist.
I am chilled by the cold blue lisp of mice
hunting for traps arranged in my closet.
One grows accustomed even to this.

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG


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and move and have their being." Iconoclasm is an essential ingredient of monotheism as understood in the Biblical tradition. Without this element, faith in God loses its indispensable character and can result neither in radical commitment to God nor in an equally radical and iconoclastic involvement in the world.

HAVING thus brought to light the iconoclastic nature of Christianity, we venture now the opinion that it was precisely this *sine qua non* of the incipient Christian movement which struck a different note in the religiously saturated atmosphere of the Graeco-Roman world and appealed to those who sought a new allegiance and a new self-understanding. As a matter of fact, the Roman authorities had at first declared that Christianity was an illicit religion, precisely because, from their point of view, Christianity meant atheism. And the reason why the Christians were charged with atheism was that they obstinately refused to make room for the emperor-worship in the order of their religious services, for on this basis alone could any religion be legally recognized. Christianity could not bow down to this decree of imperial deification which was universally applied, with one single exception: Judaism was exempted from honoring it.

Later on, Augustine was the iconoclast of religious isolationism, of Christian ethnolatry. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas' reliance on Aristotle was no less than a repudiation of the intellectual isolationism which the Christian tradition was being tempted by. The iconoclasm of the Reformation is better known, for it has been made notorious. But we would commit an error if we did not realize that the Reformers' iconoclasm was also and chiefly an instrument of combat against ecclesiastic pretension to deity or simply to sacredness. And we should not hesitate to apprehend in the same light the better side of the inconoclasm which marks the French Revolution. The latter is a monument to the iconoclastic rebellion against the claim of ecclesiastic sacredness, just as the American Revolution is a monument against the claim of theological sacredness. By the claim of ecclesiastical sacredness I refer to the subjugation of cultural and social institutions to the usurpative authority of another institution, the Christian Church. The claim of theological sacredness refers to the authoritarian subordination of all institutions to the letter of a dead body of doctrines. The former is the Catholic (not necessarily Roman), while the latter is the Protestant temptation of a religious absolutism which is fatal to the tradition of Christian iconoclasm.

What has happened to this iconoclastic tradition? Has it exhausted itself? At any rate, it does not make itself felt today. Its strength seems to have been drained, and with an exceptional voice heard now and then, here and there, the Christian churches seem on the whole incapable of being seized with any kind of iconoclastic witness to the monotheistic faith they claim to profess. How does one explain this lethargy? Let us take an example.

Whatever part of our democratic ideals we owe to ancient Greece, our modern understanding of democracy makes no sense if we do not take into account the marks that the Christian tradition has left upon it. Just think of Jefferson's words, which everyone knows by heart and which were recently given new meaning by Mr. Stevenson in the United Nations Security

## The Absent-Minded Are Always to Blame

What do you look for down there
in the cracks of the pavement? Or up there
between the pineapple and the acanthus leaf
in that uninspired ornament? Odysseus
wading half-naked out of the shrubbery
like a god, dead serious among those at play
could hardly be more out of it. In school
we striped your back with chalk, you all oblivious,
your eyes harnessed by a transparent strand
reaching the other side of things, or down
like a wellchain to the center of earth.
Now with those same eyes you pull the
pavements up like old linoleum,
arches of triumph stagger and collapse
minutes after you slowly turn away.

ADRIENNE RICH



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Council: "We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that all men are *created* equal, that they are endowed by their *Creator* with certain inalienable Rights" [italics added]. I feel certain that practically no one today sees any connection between such a statement and the meaning of the Biblical notion according to which man is created in the image of God, as explained earlier in this article. On the contrary, the words "created" and "Creator" hardly shock us. They have lost their iconoclastic value.

Or consider democratic procedures in general. Reinhold Niebuhr, who suggests humility as the political cornerstone of democracy, defines the latter as "a method of finding proximate solution for insoluble problems," and bases this method on the acknowledgment that "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." But, it was W. H. Auden, a poet and not a theologian, who brought to light the iconoclastic element around which Niebuhr's paradoxes revolved. In his "New Year Letter" for 1940, Auden wrote:

> . . . all that we can say
> Is: true democracy begins
> With free confession of our sins.
> In this alone are all the same,
> All are so weak that none dare claim
> "I have the right to govern," or
> "Behold in me the Moral Law."

But "art is not life and cannot be/ A midwife to society." It is questionable whether theological paradoxes and the Christian tradition can again play the role of "a midwife to society" as they once did when they were impelled by the force of their iconoclastic insights. For these insights have now become commonplace notions, not to say platitudes. Besides, what man in the street would ever connect checks and balances with the confession of our sins? And while it may be true that no politician would point to himself as personifying the moral law, he would most probably not hesitate to confess the sins of his opponent. Our point is this: the iconoclastic faith of the Christian tradition has, as in the time of the Prophets, fallen into an ethnolatric complacency. And the present degeneration of the Christian tradition is to be attributed to this loss of its iconoclastic nerve.

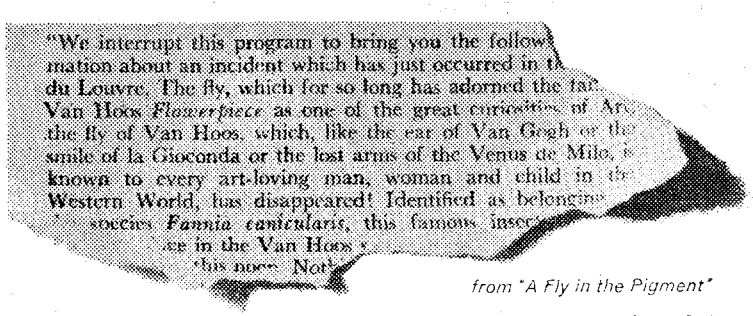
In this respect our situation is similar to that of the Graeco-Roman world at the time of the birth of Christianity, except for the fact that the position of Christianity vis-à-vis the non-Christian religions has been reversed. The Greek gods had been discredited when the Christian God was ushered into the Western world: every religion degenerates when it discredits its god. And now as then the mood is one of longing, such longing as is quenched only by an iconoclastic wind of the spirit. More and more evidently, Christianity is no longer moved by it; and our culture is expropriating Christianity. The Protestant churches — most of which owe their origins to social or ethnic differences — find it difficult to surmount the animosities of their ethnolatrous clanishness. And the Catholics still wait for the Protestants to return and submit to Rome. A truly iconoclastic move would consist in the Protestant Churches' abdicating their individual infallibilities and in the Catholic Church's abdicating its papal infallibility. But such an iconoclastic move would demand too much boldness from our comfortable, self-righteous and degenerate religiosities.

# ARCHITECTURE

## *Walter McQuade*

SEVERAL weeks ago, Robert Moses posed beside a model of the enormous piece of hardware which will be the symbol of his World's Fair for 1964, to be built with hard-headed practicality out over the old sewer layout for the 1939 fair at Flushing Meadows, New York. Upon this occasion he was quoted in *The New York Times* as admitting that he never had understood, in 1939, what the trylon and perisphere had meant. A lot of people didn't, of course, but it is going to be very hard to mistake the new symbol, which he displayed so proudly. It is a large steel-frame globe, and on it at various places will be represented various parts of the world. The only thing missing in the picture is a battery of gas pumps at the bottom.

If this bit of roadside inspirational decoration, a trite cartoon in iron, is a symbol of the fair, may the Lord save us from the physical reality of the rest of it. I hope the board of directors is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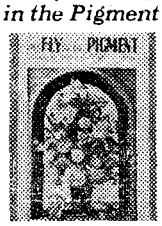


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getting alarmed about the fair they have Mr. Moses sitting on, but it will not surprise me if they wake up far too late. Moses is a marvelously large human being, a wit, a charmer, an artist at invective; but I can't think of anyone worse to guide a look into the physical future, to catch the spirit of things coming. At this he is lost and, worse, is contemptuous of intellectual quality. He is a symbol, in design and architecture, of things we hope past—of massiveness, of authoritarian arrogance, and smug scorn for contemporary visual lyricism. A day or two after the symbol appeared in the papers the story broke that many nations of the world — Britain, France, Italy and the Scandinavian countries are some of them — were not going to participate in this World's Fair, and there was a statement from Moses that he didn't need their participation. "We are not the least disturbed. . . ." Their stated reason was that the fair in the U.S. had not qualified according to the rules of the Bureau of International Expositions. But I wonder if, instead, they had not all received the usual Biblical edict of command from a man named Moses, postmarked Flushing Meadows, had looked into it, discovered he wasn't the real Moses, and decided not to play for a while. Their absence will make the fair's symbol even more of a joke. More recently New York City, having grumbled about helping to finance the fair, has accepted the unavoidable.

THE OTHER surprising rumor about the fair is that the entertainment side of it is being played down; the focus so far announced will be the old aquacade — which, like the water mains and storm sewers, is left over from the last fair. A headline in the *Herald Tribune* read "Moses Bars Crude, Cheap 'Fun' at Fair."

But I simply will not believe this. No board of directors could be so unsound as to avoid a bit of midway at a World's Fair; it would be indecently inhuman. No matter how virtuous the major exhibitions, an American World's Fair is an overgrown carnival as a part of its human draw, and it is mightily pompous to suppose otherwise. The midway area is the place where the visitor recognizes himself in his failings and follies. But the central section should not be silly, nor its architecture vulgar. There the challenge is positive, to lift the eyes, even hopes of the people who come from a distance to catch a look at tomorrow. Every World's Fair should have custard stands, but none should be one.

I'm not going through the customary polite paean as to what mighty public service this man Moses has rendered in the past, how wealthy and honest he is, etc. It is all true, and you can read it regularly in the Sunday *Times*. The present tragic truth — tragic for him, in a great career which has become clumsily destructive in the last several years, and tragic for his city, too — is that he may already be close to kicking another situation in the head. Unless he alters his sardonic suspicion of anything new, intellectual or graceful in architecture, he is a depressing man to have heading the fair program. If it is good architecturally, it will be in spite of him. And this is not unimportant; fairs begin with their buildings.

# THEATRE

## *Harold Clurman*

I HAD a somewhat strange reaction to *The Happiest Girl in the World,* the musical comedy with "book" by Fred Saidy and Henry Myers (freely adapted from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*), lyrics by E. Y. Harburg and music by Jacques Offenbach (Martin Beck Theatre). The first act struck me as faintly amateurish in a professional sort of way. I could not make out why, with so many gifted people on the stage, the performance imparted so little conviction. There was more than enough camping going on, coupled with sexy innuendos in a college-boy manner, which resulted in an effect of foolish innocence rather than Broadway bawdry: a general impression of "Hasty Pudding."

Wasn't it time for *Lysistrata* to be put to bed? The poor girl has been overworked beyond the capacity of Oedipus himself. I have seen her in at least five different guises. But perhaps that was not the true cause for my confusion. Something about the production smacked of calculated improvisation. By this I mean that every element for the making of a good musical had been thought out in advance and carefully prepared; yet the show seemed to have no root in anyone's spontaneous impulse. Expertise was evident in various features of the performance, but one had a suspicion that the construction crew had been wondering what gag it might be useful to conjure up next. Breakdown always appeared imminent.

Something happened in the second act:

## Gog

I woke to a shout: "I am Alpha and Omega!"
Rocks and a few trees trembled
Deep in their own country.
I ran and an absence bounded beside me.

The dog's god is a scrap dropped from the table,
The mouse's saviour is a ripe wheat grain—
Hearing the messiah cry
My mouth widens in adoration.

How fat are the mosses!
They cushion themselves on the silence.
The dust, too, is replete.
The air wants for nothing.

What was my error? My skull has sealed it out.
My great bones are massed in me.
They beat on the earth, my song excites them.
I do not look at the rocks and trees, I am frightened of what they see.

I listen to the song jarring my mouth
Where the skull-rooted teeth are in possession.
I am massive on earth. My feetbones beat on the earth
Over the sounds of motherly weeping . . .

Afterwards, I drink at a pool quietly.
The horizons bear the rocks and trees away into twilight.
I lie down. I become darkness—
Darkness that all night sings and circles stamping.

TED HUGHES



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I began to accept the show on its own terms and found it pleasant. There were at least two bright musical surprises (novel means of staging certain familiar Offenbach tunes); the music itself—including one of my favorite melodies from *La Belle Hélène*—began to exert its charm and I was ready to assert that the show had the best score since that of *Kismet* (which, you remember, had borrowed generously from Borodin). The lyrics improved, the byplay grew funnier. Cyril Ritchard had become cute without causing irritation. Janice Rule's lovely legs, slim figure, burnished visage and graceful movement began to win me, and the rest of the cast—including Dran Seitz, as a vocally and visually satisfactory Lysistrata, Lu Leonard as an eager and burly housewife, Joy Claussen, a pretty puss—all turned the evening into an agreeable romp.

IF the anthologists of the season's "Ten Best Plays" succeed this year—as by custom and contract they must—in naming so large a number, Henry Denker's *A Far Country* (Music Box) will have to be among them. It is about the first case in which Sigmund Freud successfully employed the redoubtable psychoanalytic method; he was then a comparatively young man of thirty-eight.

There is no question that the detailing of the patient's symptoms in *A Far Country* and the process by which Freud first arrives at the decision to try the new technique, and then goes about applying it, hold the audience's rapt attention. (Trials at law and medical problems involving diagnosis and therapy are among the sure-fire devices of the entertainment field.) There is also the purely biographical attraction of the play: Freud was a Jew who had to face the dual hostility of his colleagues. A pioneer like Pasteur, he was engaged in an uncharted and even dangerous medical enterprise—defying the prevailing science of his day—in his experiment with the pretty patient whose inability to walk no other doctor in Vienna had been able to cure or even explain.

*A Far Country* is a documentary which narrates its facts in the compressed and consolingly plausible manner of a television play—which it originally was. A lady who sat in front of me at the theatre kept nodding her head all through the performance in confirmation and approval of the play's every scene; her gesture was of real critical assistance to me. It made me understand the nature of the audience's absorption. It is as if everyone were murmuring, "Yes. It's all true. That's the way it works. That's psychoanalysis. The patient couldn't walk because she was suffering from a guilt complex. She was punishing herself. And because Dr. Freud made her discover this for herself and didn't blame her, she got well enough not only to walk but to dance. That Freud was a great man like Roosevelt in *Sunrise at Campobello*, great like Annie Sullivan who made Helen Keller talk in *The Miracle Worker*."

*A Far Country* is an educational melodrama which teaches the audience what it already has heard, read, seen, knows, or hopes for. Duly grateful as the revelation reaches its therapeutic climax, the audience is almost ready to shout a triumphal "Q.E.D."!

Kim Stanley, one of the finest actresses in our theatre, sumptuous if somewhat overweight, plays with commanding sensibility what for her is the comparatively easy role of the patient. One hangs on her every word, not only because of her native talent, but because one watches for minute traits of histrionic characterization in a part written—as is most of the play—without any real character. Steven Hill, with cutting voice, plays the young Freud with eyes piercingly concentrated on the patient. He is like an intellectual detective and one might suspect him of mental sadism if there were not an occasional flicker of sweetness in his smile. Sam Wanamaker as Dr. Breuer, Freud's physician friend and reluctant collaborator, is thoroughly direct and precise—adding further pressure to the production which Alfred Ryder has directed with spare dramatic drive, thrusting like a knife to assassinate all obstructive skepticism.

## Last Song

*(from the Spanish of Miguel Hernández)*

Painted, but not empty:
this house of mine is painted
in the hues of giant
passions and despair.

It will be retrieved
from grief where it was borne
with one deserted table
and a shattered bed.

Kisses on the pillows
will plump them up again.
From our bodies in
the sheets will rise a dense
nocturnal vine's perfume.

Hatred will be scotched
behind the window pane.

Fists will open gently.

Let this be my hope.

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# Letters

(*Continued from inside cover*)

American artists. Might I suggest that we Americans do a bit more thinking about why *we* fail to influence the policy of *our* government more towards reduction of world tensions when our hearts and our very lives, not to speak of our applauding hands, are clamoring for it?

JACQUELINE SHARPE
*New York City*

## Progress Begins at Home

*Dear Sirs:* As the business agent of two union locals in marginal industries, I would like to comment on your editorial (April 1) in reference to President Kennedy's plans for Latin Americans.

Because they work in marginal industries in this country, Spanish-speaking people cannot even get a representation election through the National Labor Relations Board because of the interstate commerce requirements which many of these industries do not meet. Because of the time it takes to investigate wage-and-hour violations, as well as infractions of state laws regarding hours and wages for women, many of these Spanish-speaking people get fired, or quit because they are forced out, without any redress.

These same people visit or write to relatives and friends in their native countries, relating their experiences and how they are pushed around.

In view of the alleged effect of letter-writing in a recent Italian election, may I suggest that this alliance with progress start at home? OSCAR R. FUSS
*Los Angeles, Calif.*

## Nirvana

*Dear Sirs:* Someone should have written you before now to tell you that perhaps the most valuable feature of *The Nation* is the crossword puzzle. After learning all that is wrong with the world two months to two years before most of the public learns it, it is a relief to engage in what gives peace of mind, or at least detachment from the world without and within. About once a month I am able to break through the baffling definitions and get all the words, but the relaxation is in the striving. The tired intellectual is as entitled to his recreation as the tired tycoon, and I know no equivalent for your puzzles. Dr. Peale should try them himself.

CHARLES G. HAMILTON, D.D.
*Booneville, Miss.*

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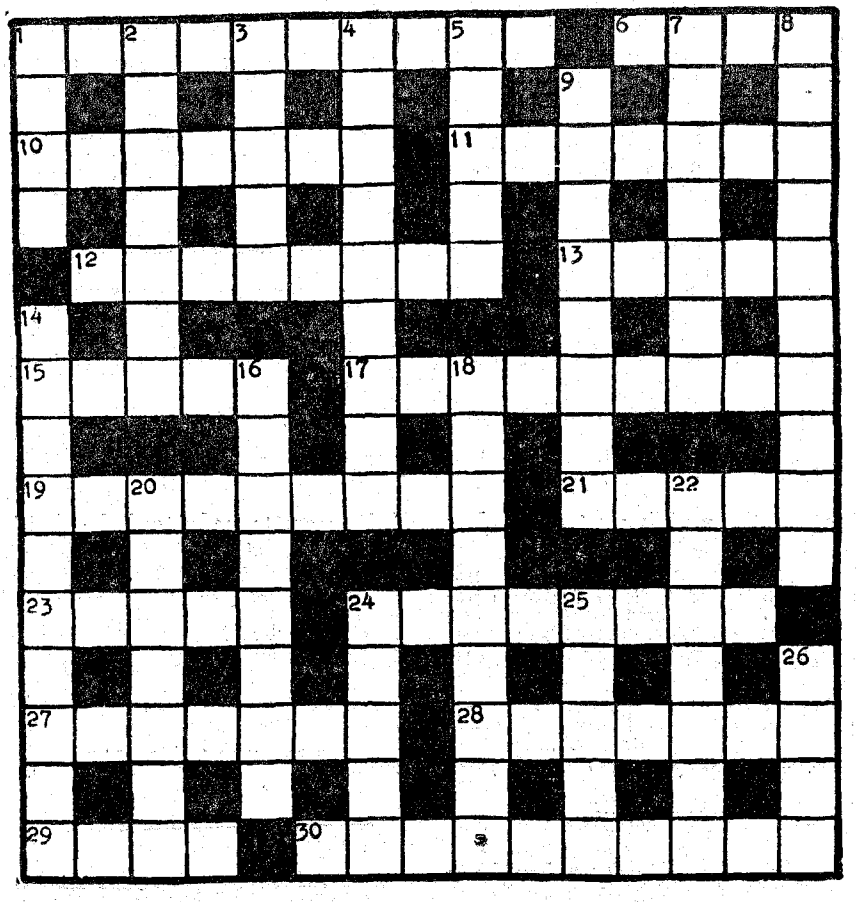
# Crossword Puzzle No. 912

By FRANK W. LEWIS



## ACROSS:

1 It's rather foolhardy to leave things around—bad boys might get them!
6 Some might make sport of it, but one way of looking at it is to give 1 across. (4)
10 Everything in the store is meant to float! (7)
11 One who acts is a funny fellow at heart, according to the old girl! (7)
12 and 18 down My net all tangled? Crazy, man! (8, 9)
13 Fliers who appeared in "Ah, Wilderness!" (5)
15 Downs half the saline remedy? (5)
17 Need icing badly? Need this, then! (9)
19 They shouldn't please those who like good actors, as chopped liver does! (9)
21 and 14 down Gets a bevel, as a matter of course? (5, 10)
23 Its turn sometimes comes during a trip. (5)
24 Sometimes knocked out in one across, as they say. (8)
27 Spotted potential danger to the hunter? (7)
28 Omaha and Utah, for example. (7)
29 Made an old-fashioned killing? (Quite a lot to twist, too!) (4)
30 "Put patches around—I can't!" they beg of you! (10)

## DOWN:

1 No one was too steep for human wit, according to Horace. (4)
2 Where a person shows those who gather inside? (7)
3 What they said Lincoln did to bad liars? (5)
4 Without consideration. (9)
5 Revolutions sometimes make one.
7 A method of procedure for what a church musician might turn? (7)
8 Fast dreams of rural vistas. (10)
9 But sugar-coated chicle doesn't come from it. (5, 3)
14 See 21 across
16 Old, rather than middle-aged? (8)
18 See 12 across
20 Weary of the 1 down? You might find it this. (7)
22 It might be an unknown article, slender and yellow. (7)
24 Take the razor to this plant, for a novel result. (5)
25 Francis is missing some money, it seems. (5)
26 What one of the 30 does for money? (4)

### SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 911

ACROSS: 1 Ostrich feathers; 9 Greatness; 10 and 4 down Snowshoes; 11 Easter; 12 Manicure; 14 Diminish; 16 Grips; 17 Speak; 18 Clashing; 20 Giraffes; 21 Scorer; 24 Spahi; 25 Inhabited; 26 Preternaturally. DOWN: 1 Orgies; 2 Tiers; 3 In the nick of time; 5 Eustachian; 6 Tossing the caber; 7 Elocution; 8 Systems; 13 Discretion; 15 Inebriate; 17 Signs up; 19 Friday; 22 Ratel; 23 Whet.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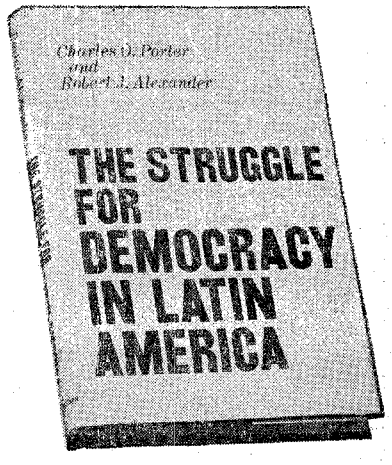


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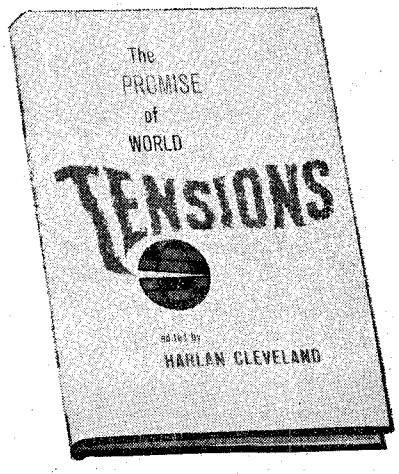


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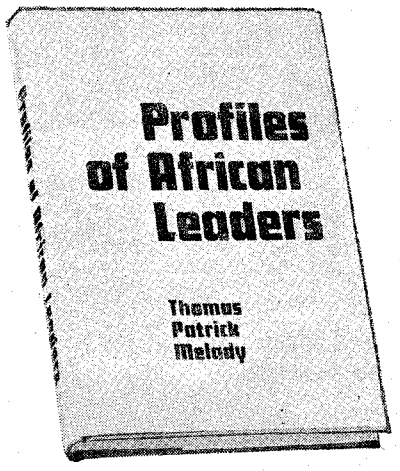


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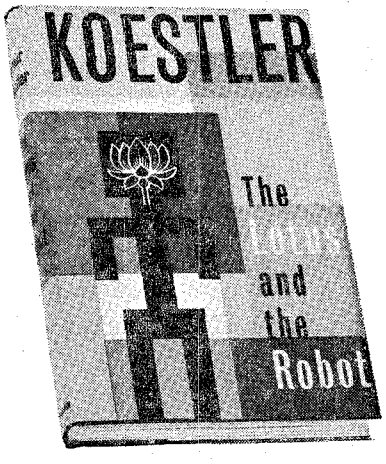


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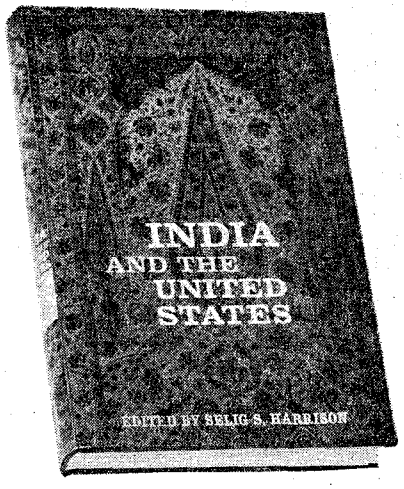


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